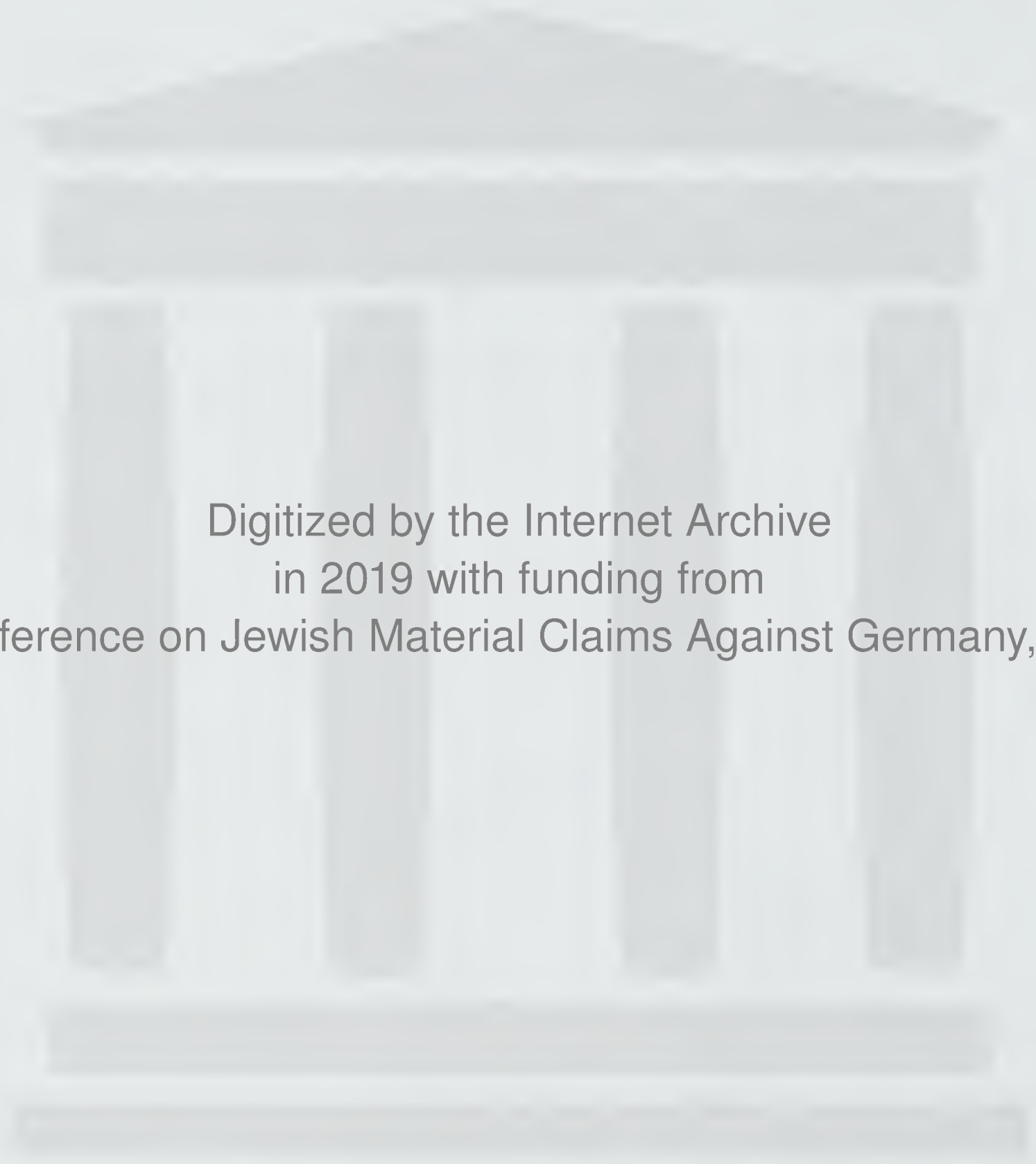


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I will not dig my own grave

(Sonia's Story)

Memoirs

By

Sonia (Barasch) Kaplan

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Sonia's Story:

A Holocaust Memoir

In this captivating narrative by a holocaust survivor, Sonia Kaplan recounts her extraordinary experiences of loss and survival through the War years.

Sonia grew up in Cholojow, a town eastern Poland that was taken over by the Soviet Union before just before the outbreak of World War II. Educated in a secular school where she was the only Jew, she learned firsthand about the virulence of Polish and Ukrainian anti-semitism from her Christian schoolmates.

She also learned firsthand about Nazi brutality. In the summer of 1941, the German army quickly overran Cholojow. They terrorized and murdered hundreds of Jews there, with the eager assistance of the local gentile population. Sonia's family fled to the forest to avoid one massacre; the surviving Jews were collected into a ghetto and forced to live under utterly abominable conditions. Sonia narrowly escaped another massacre; but her family did not; from November 1941 to the end of the war, she was an orphan who survived by her wits, her luck, and her ability to pass herself off as a Christian.

Sonia fled to Lvov, then to several small villages where she lived with one family who let her knit for room and board, then another family that needed a nanny for their baby. She invented explanations for her lack of papers, and immersed herself for nearly three years in a Ukrainian culture that despised Jews even without Nazi encouragement. Her observations from the vantage point of a false gentile taught her to keep her Jewish identity secret, even after the Soviet Army liberated her village.

In July 1944 she was conscripted into a Soviet work battalion and sent to Russia, where she stayed until the end of the War, still posing as a Christian. After Germany's defeat she returned to Poland, where she found only one sister. She joined the Zionist movement Dror, was sent to the 22nd World Zionist Congress in Zurich, and joined with a group planning an illegal aliyah to British Mandatory Palestine. Her group was smuggled over the Alps into Italy, but she ended up in post-war France, rather than Israel. After five years in France, she and her husband emigrated to the United States, where they raised a family.

Sonia Kaplan's engrossing narrative reveals the fear, despair, pessimism, and hopelessness of a child orphaned by the Holocaust; but her story also presents a spellbinding account of determination, wits, and luck that enabled her to survive the ordeals of the war years. Her saga offers insight into the hatred and wrath of an anti-semitic culture underlying the communist veneer of western Russia, and provides an exceptional perspective on the destruction wrought by the War. The Nazi demons destroyed her home, her family, and her world; but she endured to establish a new life in America. This fascinating chronicle presents a harrowing yet uplifting saga of Jewish survival.

Sonia's story



Sonia (Barash) Kaplan

1950

This book is dedicated to my children; Bob, Hank, Eileen, Marni and my grand-children; Rachel, Benjamin, Esther and Morriah, and my nephews David and Mark. They encouraged me to write it and were helpful with typing and editing.

CHOLOJOW

I was born in the year 1926; In a small village called Cholojow. It was located in the eastern part of Poland where the bulk of the population is Ukrainian. My town was 62 Km from the town of Lvov. It was a small agricultural village. There was one big Polish landowner, smaller Ukrainian landowners, and a few Polish families who owned land. All the others worked for the big land owner and he paid them. The Jews were mostly small store keepers, shoe makers, tailors, small artisans, working mostly in their homes. Most of them were poor or barely making a living.

My father Shloime Barasch was a tailor, a very good one. His father was a tailor and so were his four brothers. There was not enough work for all the tailors in our small town, and that created tension in the family. My father, who was a soldier in World War I, came back home sick. What was wrong with him? I do not know. All I remember is that every winter my father was in bed sick.

The only so-called industry in the village was a brewery that belonged to the Polish big land owner we called Graf-Badinia or Count-Badinia.

The population of the town was about 5000 persons, maybe 2000 of them were Jewish. The Jewish community was very religious, very law abiding with the Rabbi as the spiritual leader. There were two religious schools, the Cheder for Jewish boys, the Beth-Yackov school for Jewish girls. We all went to a public school from 8 to 12 or 1 PM, after that we would go to the religious schools. All we were taught in the religious school was to read and write Hebrew, prayers and religious observances. For the teenagers, there were all kinds of political and social organizations. They would meet in somebody's house or rent a room from some widow and meet there for fun; games and discussions.

The Jews lived in the middle of the town and the non-Jews lived on all sides. The non-Jews would come to town to do their shopping and the Jews would go to the non-Jews to buy food from the farms. Once a week the farmers would bring their products to the market (which was an empty lot right in the center of the village).

Most of the time the relations between the two communities were friendly and good. The children in school got along; I had Jewish as well as non-Jewish friends. That all changed in the 1930's when Hitler came to power in Germany, and a wave of anti-Semitism hit Poland.

My grandfather (on my mother's side) Joseph Gruber and his wife Faiga, lived in an even smaller village called Rokiety, about 15 km from Cholojow. My grandfather was one of the few Jews who were landowners. There was only one more Jewish family who owned land in Rokiety, the Wiseglass family, but they did not live in Rokiety, but in Lvov. Their estate was managed by another poor Jewish family. Mr. Wiseglass and his wife and two sons Rich and Kuba came only to Rokiety in the summer for their vacation.

My grandfather lived in Rokiety all his life. He had a very good relationship with the non-Jewish population. He was a wise and generous man. People, Jews and non-Jews looked up to him, came to him for advice and help. He was known for his generosity in the whole area.

There were no stores in this village. My grandfather would go once every week to Kamionka (a nearby town) where he was selling his products from the farm. He would bring back all the necessary products from stores; like sugar, salt, fabrics, cigarettes etc. He would always bring things for his neighbors, for those that could not go to town.

There was no doctor in the village. My grandmother was the adviser on home remedies or some nourishing food for a sick and poor neighbor. The people knew that they could count on my grandparents. They were well liked and respected.

My grandparents had 8 children. The two daughters, Sara and Betty, came to the United States shortly after World War I. The oldest son Vovish was mobilized by the Austrians (who at the time occupied that part of Poland) to fight the Russians in World War I. He became a prisoner of war in Russia, fell in love with Sonia, a Russian Jewish girl, married her, had two kids and then was send away to Siberia by the Bolsheviks. He was released in 1935 when he finally got permission to return to Poland. They settled in the town of Lvov, 62 km from Cholojow.

My aunt Sara went to the US with the family of her fiancé. As soon as she could, she sent papers for my mother Raizel, to come to the US.

My mother was already in love with my father. My grandparents were desperately against my father because he was only a "poor tailor" from a nearby village. My mother would not give in. After my grandparents gotten to know my father and his family, my grandfather agreed to the marriage, but my grandmother never let him forget that. Since my mother would not go to the US without my father: her younger sister Betty went in her place.

My mother and father got married and moved to Cholojow, and bought an old house from a widow named Pesia, who had no family. She remained living with my parents until she died; and she became part of our family. When I was about two years old we had a fire in our house. The house burned to the ground. There was no insurance. My parents had to borrow money from friends and relatives and they built a new house. As soon as the new house was habitable Pesia came back to live with us.

The fifth son Ira married a girl from Tarnopol and settled there. One son died in an epidemic his name was Chaim. My grandfather's two youngest children, uncle Abraham and aunt Lilly lived with my grandfather in Rokiety until 1937 when my aunt Lilly left for the United States. In 1939, six months before World War II started, my Uncle Abraham came to the United States.

ROKIETY

It is February 2, 1981. I am sitting here in my office, doing bookkeeping for our business. It is a cold and dreary day and since I don't have too much work I decided to write down some thoughts that were swirling in my mind. I am looking out of the window and it is beginning to snow. My thoughts go back to another day like this, the winter of 1930 when I was almost four years old.

There is a large room with a bed, where my father lies; he is sick. There is a long 'L' shaped wooden bench around a heated wall. On the bench are sitting or standing; my four brothers, my sister and I, each of us trying to get closer to the warm spot on the wall. The room is cold. I get pushed away from the warm wall. I go to the window. One spot on the frozen window cleared up and I can look outside. It was beautiful. The whole world outside was white. Then I heard the ringing of bells and I saw a sleigh with horses coming toward our house. What a joy! It was my grandfather and my aunt Lilly, bringing food from my grandfather's farm that would last for a while.

When they saw the circumstances in our house, they decide to take one of the children with them to make it easier for my sick and fragile mother. For some reason my mother decided to send me.

Only now do I know the reason: My mother did not want me. It took me many years to admit that to myself. Why didn't she want me? My mother was raised in a time when girls had no value; they were a burden, they needed dowries. When I was born, my mother already had two boys and one girl to help her with the work. If she had to have a fourth child, she wanted a boy.

There was an old woman Pesia living with my parents, who took care of me; consequently, I became her favorite. I was told that my father loved me. When my father became sick and Pesia died, my grandfather offered to take one child to make it easier for mother, I was the natural choice. By that time I was about four years old. My mother had two more boys she would not give up, and she needed my older sister to help her. My sister was four years older.

I lived with my grandparents for five years. My grandfather loved me, but to my grandmother I was a burden. I loved my aunt Lilly. She was about

15 years older and she became my second mother. I slept with her in her room. She would dress me and comb my hair. At the time I was told that I am the lucky one, I am lucky to be living with my grandparents because I had food to eat and a warm place to be in. In reality those were five lonely years.

I remember saying good-bye to my four brothers and sister and I remember tears running down my father's face when he kissed me good-bye. I was wrapped-up in my grandfather's fur coat and we went to my grandmother's house. The trip took two hours and I threw-up all the way. When we got to my grandfather's house it was night. I was washed and fed and put to bed.

When I got up the next morning and looked around, everything looked strange, the house, the people, everything. I missed my mother and father and my brothers and sister; I missed my friends.

My grandparents lived on a farm in Rokiety. Here there were only two Jewish families. The people that were visiting them spoke a strange Ukrainian language that I did not understand. The house was warm and there was plenty of food, but I was very lonely. The people who visited frightened me and I began to hide whenever strangers came to the house. The whole winter I was in the house because I had no warm clothing to go outside. Occasionally my aunt Lilly would wrap me up in my grandmother's coat and take me out for a ride on a sleigh. My aunt tried to fatten me up but I lost my appetite. The meals became unpleasant to me. I did not complain because I was told I am the lucky one, but I missed my family.

Little by little I got used to my grandparents, especially becoming fond of my grandfather and my ant Lilly. My grandfather always had a smile for me and when he went to the town of Kamionka he would bring me candies, which was a big thing in those days. He even sometimes played with me by pretending that he has my nose or my ear in his hands and I would struggle and try to open his hands and get back my nose. I loved those moments but they were rare. Most of the time I was left to myself, and since I had no toys to play with I would sit in a corner or stand by the window and daydream.

I loved the summers because I could play outside. I learned the Ukrainian and Polish languages and made friends. Specially nice were the two months of July and August. When school stopped, my older brothers Ira (Ire, in Jewish), Eli and my sister Rosa would come. Sometimes other children would come from Lvov: the children of my uncle Vovish, (Slava and Sioma). I liked them very much. Slava and Sioma were full of life and

mischievous. They were only a short time in Poland and they already learned the Polish language. They were very bright and good students. We had wonderful summers together. I introduced them to my non-Jewish friends and most of the time we all played together, except on holidays, when my non-Jewish friends came from church and they would not play with me. When I asked them why, they would tell me because Jews killed Christ. I did not understand what they were talking about. When I asked my grandfather, he explained to me that Christ was a good Jew who was killed by the Romans, who killed many good Jews by crucifixion. My non-Jewish friends would not believe me because their priest told them that it were the Jews that killed Christ and they believed their priest. They were five or six years old kids.

When I was seven years old my aunt Lilly enrolled me in the school. The school was in another village, called Dolina, (a one hour walk from my house). Here again I was the only Jewish child in the whole school.

The trouble started on the first day, when the children got up to pray making the sign of the cross, putting their hands together and praying. I just stood there, I knew the Jewish prayers because my grandparents were God-fearing Jews and I knew it was a sin for a Jewish girl to make the sign of the cross. Silently, I said the Jewish prayer. When we came out of school, a bunch of kids waited for me, beat me up for not making the sign of the cross and told me if I complained or told somebody, they would beat me more.

The next morning they waited for me again, took away my lunch and told me again that I had to pray like everybody else.

How could I? I was a religious Jewish child and believed that if I made the sign of the cross I would go straight to hell. I did not make the sign of the cross, but all day, I feared what would happen on the way home. I knew that the bad kids would wait for me. With the help of my non-Jewish friends, we found a new way to get home, and I avoided the beating that day.

Soon those bad kids would wait for me in the most unexpected places; and school became hell for me. I used to give them my lunch, give them any toys I had, do their homework. Sometime it helped; most of the time it did not. Some of my non-Jewish friends would stand up for me, and sometimes they got beat up because they were defending me. Eventually it reached the point that even though I was educated in the Jewish tradition and knew if I made the sign of the cross I would go straight to hell, (hell was a long way off and those boys were right there) I started making the sign of the cross every

day and pretending I was praying because I did not want to be beaten up every day. Even that did not stop the torment. They found other excuses, calling me Christ-killer and other names.

When winter came we could not walk to school. It was too cold, so my aunt Lilly taught me at home. I was happy not to have to face my tormentors. In the spring, the same thing started all over again. Somehow my grandparents found out about the beatings I was getting. There was nothing they could do about it, but send me back to Cholojow, back to my mother. I finished my first year with an excellent report card and after the vacation in September I returned home to my mother, my sisters and my brothers.

After being away for five years, home was not home anymore. Again everything was strange, there was little food in my home and I was just one more mouth to feed. My father was dead already three years, and I found a sick, weak mother, two older brothers Ira, Eli and my older sister Rosa and two younger brothers Nachman, Benjamin and my baby sister Schlomche. When my father died he left my mother with six children (the oldest was twelve) and she was pregnant with the seventh child. When my sister Schlomche was born she was named after my father whose name was Shloime.

My oldest brother Ira was very bright, and it was my father's wish that he be a scholar. He was enrolled in the Yeshiva, a Jewish school of higher learning. He was my mother's pride. All the other kids were still in school, except the youngest who were only three and six years old. I came back to my family, but now I was a stranger to them, I was the outsider.

There was not enough food for all. Why was there so little food in my mother's house, when my grandfather had a farm with plenty of food?

My grandfather was very generous man. He was giving food to strangers. When I think back I can only explain it this way; according to the way my mother was thinking, food was not important. She used to tell us: "Nobody can see what is in your stomach." My grandmother never let her forget that she did not listen to her parents, so it was her fault for the condition she was in. She hated the idea that her parents had to support her and her children, so she never asked for anything and when she took things she tried to take as little as possible and make it last as long as possible. My mother came from a rich family and she would not let anybody think that we

were poor. Aunt Betty would send us packages of clothing from the United States, and she would remake them and fix them and we were dressed nice. We had our house, and my mother would take in borders to help her with expenses. She even had some jewelry and furs. On the outside everything looked fine, but there were many days that I went to school without breakfast, and at lunch time I would run away from my friends so they would not see that I didn't have any lunch. There were no school lunches in our town Cholojow. You had to bring your lunch from home. When I came home from school there was a potato soup waiting for me, meat we only had once a week and sometime not even that. The most important thing was; "That nobody should know that you are hungry." My mother kept repeating to us: "nobody can see what's in your stomach."

In the town of Cholojow everything was taught in the Polish language in school. Because there were many Ukrainian people we also had to learn the Ukrainian language. Starting with the second grade we had a daily hour of Ukrainian lessons.

In Rokiety they started the Ukrainian language in the first grade and the Polish language in the second grade, because in Rokiety the majority of the people were Ukrainian. When my mother went to register me in school in Cholojow they would not accept me in the second grade because I had not been taught the Polish language. I knew the Polish language well, I also knew how to read and write Polish because my aunt Lilly taught me at home. My mother told them that. She went to the principal, but he was a great anti-Semite and he would not make an exception for a Jewish child. I had to repeat the first grade one more year. I was devastated. All my friends were in second grade, and I knew both languages better than they did.

The first day in school I was miserable, being with kids who were learning the ABC's. At lunch time I saw the principal standing in the hall with some teachers. I walked over to him and pleaded with him to test me. He looked at me, smiled, did not test me but turned to the second grade teacher right there in the hall, and told her to accept me to the second grade. (I think he liked the way I spoke the Polish Language.) To me that was a miracle, and from that day on I loved school in Cholojow. I was a good student, and kept my special relationship with the principal throughout all the school years.

His favorite game was to keep all Jewish kids after school for an extra hour. His favorite day to do that was Friday. On those days he would send

me home with the non-Jewish kids. I think it was because I did not look Jewish. I was blond with blue eyes and I spoke Polish without an accent.

The only bad part of school was that the school was located in the non-Jewish neighborhood. Some days some non-Jewish boys would throw rocks and terrorize the Jewish kids. If we complained to the teachers or to the authorities the answer was: "If you don't like it, go to Palestine."

My two younger brothers Nachman and Benjamin would go home an hour before me, and they were scared to walk the few blocks from school until they reached the Jewish neighborhood. I volunteered to be their guide. When the kids threw rocks, I threw them back. One day a boy took my brother's new hat, so I ran after him and got the hat back. When my mother heard about it she was shocked at my behavior, telling me: "Jewish kids don't fight. Just run away from them and don't fight back."

In the late 30's anti-Semitism got really bad. We would get up in the morning and find written on the walls of our houses all kinds of anti-Semitic inscriptions, like, "Kill the Jews they are your enemies," "Do not buy from a Jew". "Jews killed Christ". "Jews are killing Christian children." Even in school we could see the effects of this propaganda. A Jewish child had to be really good to get a 'C' grade while non-Jewish kids who were half as good would get an 'A' grade.

In the village of Rokiety where my grandfather lived, things changed. My aunt Lilly left for the United States in 1937. The people of the village became hostile to my grandparents, and would rob them, take away things, terrorize them, and they would find inscriptions on the walls: "Jew get out of Rokiety or we would kill you."

My uncle Abe could not leave his old parents alone. Before he left for the US, he sold the house and barns, and my grandparents came to live with us. My grandparents were devastated; my grandfather Joseph Gruber could not believe that people who were his friends since childhood, people that he helped and loved, turned against him. As soon as he came to live with us he became sick, and died six months later. The doctor said he died of old age. He was seventy-two years old, and I think he died of a broken heart. My grandmother had a nervous breakdown; and yet, my grandparents were the lucky ones. They got out alive, Many other Jews who lived in villages like my grandparents were simply killed. They did not get out in time.

Many Jews tried desperately to get out of Poland. My aunts in the USA sent out affidavits for my grandmother, my older sister, and my uncle Vovish who lived in Lvov with his family. It took a long time to get a visa. They never got theirs in time.

My grandfather did not sell his land, believing land is the best investment because nobody can steal it, or burn it, and it would always be there for his children and grandchildren.

RUSSIAN OCCUPATION.

September 1939, the Germans and the Russians divided Poland among themselves. The part of Poland where I lived, Cholojow, became part of Russia and all the land belonged to the state. All of my grandfathers land now belonged to the state too and it was given to the people who had no land.

When the Germans invaded Poland, we only heard about the war on the radio and in the newspapers. When the Russian Army marched into our town Cholojow, for us the war was finished. Many things changed. In school, the official language was not Polish anymore, but Ukrainian, with one hour everyday instruction in the Russian language. The Principal of the school (who was a high-ranking officer in the Polish Army), never came back to Cholojow. There were rumors that somehow he ended up in England. His wife was sent away to a prison camp in Siberia, together with many other people whose only crime was that they were rich or had high-ranking positions with the Polish Government. Many of the teachers in the school were replaced. The new Principal was a man who was sent from Kiev, a Party man, a Communist.

Open anti-Semitism was against the law. Grading in school was fair. The Russians brought in many people from Russia, who were in leading positions in the Police and the City Government. Ukrainian became the official language.

Many of the rich people including Count-Badinia, who was the big landowner in our village, run away before the Russians came. His land was taken over by the Government and divided among the people. All the other possessions, like livestock, buildings and brewery, were managed by a Russian administrate for the Government.

The administrator needed a technician to run the Brewery, since the former ran away together with the Count-Badinia. There was nobody qualified in our village, so they brought in a man from a nearby town, named Izak Baras. He was young and bright and he became the director of the brewery. Eventually he met and fell in love with my sister Rosa, who was very beautiful. First he gave her a job in the brewery, and they eventually got married.

My older brother wanted very much to have a job but there were none available in our town. The Russians promised jobs in Russia. Together with many boys and girls he signed up to go to Russia. The Russians took them to

a region called Dombas and put them to work in coal mines, under the most primitive and terrible conditions. After a few of them were injured, the others came home.

When my brother came home he was very skinny and sick. When he recovered, my brother-in-law Izak gave him and my other brother Eli jobs in the brewery.

Eli was only 17 years old. How happy he was to be able to work even when the pay was very low. Since he was 13 he had wanted to work. My brother Eli wanted to be a tailor. My mother asked our uncle Moishe (my father's brother) to take him in as an apprentice. In those days when you were an apprentice you had to do everything that was asked of you, from cleaning the house to taking care of small children if there were any in the house. My uncle had sons of his own. Eventually he figured that Cholojow will have enough tailors without my brother. Also his relationship with my mother was not the best. After my father died, my mother had very little to do with my father's family. After all, they were only "tailors." Anyway, after 3 years of apprenticeship, my brother learned how to clean the house, how to take care of small children, but very little tailoring. On top of this he became a very sickly boy, always catching something and ending up in bed sick.

Life for me improved somewhat. In the Polish schools, children had to buy books and notebooks. Since we were poor I never had any books of my own. In order to do my homework, I had to borrow from friends or sometimes do somebody's homework or help them with their homework in order to have access to the books. To get money for notebooks, (since the age of ten), I was tutoring children from lower grades or sometimes children in my class. I would make enough money for my notebooks, pens and pencils, and sometimes even help my brothers buy their notebooks and pencils. Now that the Russians were in charge, we were all given the books free. For the first time I had my own books. I could do my homework on my own time. I still continued my tutoring because I had some students who liked me and I became fond of them and I still needed the money.

One of my students was Joel Indek. His mother was a highly educated and intelligent woman. Joel's sister Frieda (Fradel, in Jewish) was one year older than I and we became friends. Her mother would pick the books for her to read, and when she finished them she passed them on to me. Mrs. Indek liked me and she encouraged her daughter's friendship with me. This woman

taught me how to read a book, how to understand a good book and she would never let us read trash. To this day, when I read a good book and enjoy it I think of Mrs. Indek.

In 1939 when the Russians set back some grades, Frieda ended up in the same grade with me. From then on we did our homework together and many times I would have my meals with them. Frieda had trouble with algebra and geometry. Those were my best subjects.

I was a good student and I liked school. I even began to dream of going on to high-school and college because I was told that good students can get scholarships. Even my mother was proud of me and showed off my report cards.

I was very close to my brother Nachman. He was 17 months younger and a genius. Whether in Jewish school (the cheder) or public school, he was outstanding. He was small and skinny, but his beautiful black eyes could read my mind like a book. Also my oldest brother Ira was very smart. Since to go to high school in Poland you had to pay, he only finished public school. He never learned algebra in the Polish schools. In the Russian schools we started to learn algebra in the 6th grade. From my books my brother learned algebra on his own, and there were times that he helped me with my homework.

In 1940 when my brother was 20 years old he was called to the Russian army. Because my father was dead and he was the oldest he got an exemption. How happy we were that he did not have to go to the army, but unfortunately it turned out to be a big mistake, because some of his friends who went to the army survived the war.

GERMAN OCCUPATION

“Get up! There is a war”. Those were the first words I heard on June 22, 1941. When my mother woke me up that Sunday morning, I opened my eyes, and I could hear a faint echo of artillery shells somewhere far away. My mother said it was war but she did not really believe it. We thought the Russian Army was conducting military exercises or maneuvers. There were a few people who had radios in our little town and soon the rumors spread that indeed it was really war. My only concern that day was for my oldest brother Ira who was 21 years old and we were afraid that he might have to go to the Army now.

The whole day we listened to the shots that seemed to be coming closer and closer. The German border was only about 100 km. away. We watched Russian soldiers and tanks going to the front singing songs of victory. We were so sure they would repel the Germans. Then come Monday and we watched the same soldiers and tanks returning. There was no more singing. Some soldiers were wounded, some tanks were pulling broken chains after them. I stood there looking after them with a sinking heart. I had a feeling that all my dreams were going with them. I knew a little about Germans. I just finished public school with highest honors, and was looking forward to high school. How I loved school! How much I wanted an education! I knew that Jewish children cannot go to school under the Germans. I knew that our lives would change. In my heart I was very frightened, but I really knew very little; because what was to come I could not have imagined in my worst nightmares.

That night nobody slept. We dug a hole in the ground and hid our valuables and some food and some clothing.

Then come Tuesday morning; in the beginning all was quiet. There were no more soldiers. Then come three artillery shots and they landed right in our town Cholojow, only about two blocks away from my home. We ran away from home when the first three artillery shots hit our town. One hour later our whole town was on fire. It looked like one big furnace from one end of town to the other.

We ran to the brewery where my sister lived; but my sister was not there anymore. There were strong brick buildings that formerly belonged to the Count-Badinia, (the brewery and the count's buildings were located about 2 km. outside the town). One of the strong brick buildings became our refuge, but when one cannon hit a building and killed some people, we ran to the

cellar. A few minutes earlier I was in the room where the cannon hit.

It was in the cellar where I first saw the first German soldiers. Since we were the only Jewish family in that cellar there were no problems. They wanted to know if there were Russians soldiers there, and since there were none they left us in peace. The walls of that cellar were becoming weaker and when there was one quiet afternoon we decided to run to the forest, because pieces of plaster were falling on our heads and we were afraid that we would be buried in that cellar. There were some artillery shots flying over our heads but we made it to the forest where we met my sister and her husband and other people we knew. We heard many sad stories, about people that were killed or injured, people that we knew.

We bought some food from a peasant who lived nearby, he also let us use the barn to rest. I was there together with my grandmother, mother, my four brothers and youngest sister Schlomche and my older sister Rosa with her husband, and many other Jewish families from our town.

It was a beautiful June day and it felt so good to be in the fresh air after three days that we spent in the cellar, but our peace was soon shattered. We saw a German patrol approaching the barn. This time we were all Jewish, but we did not expect any trouble because after all they were only regular soldiers. Since they found no Russian soldiers among us, they declared that my brother-in-law Izak, who wore green pants must be a spy. They decided to take him out in the forest and shoot him. I can still hear my poor sister's cries as she ran after them, begging them not to shoot her husband. We were all left stunned.

I don't know whether it was my sister's cries or the American dollars that they found in my brother-in-law's wallet, that saved his life, but after a while they let him go. One of the soldiers looked at my sister, who was a very beautiful woman, and asked her why she did not run away with the Russians. Wanting to flatter the soldier, she said that she did not think there's any reason to fear the Germans. He looked at her again and said: "Germans don't like the Jews." The fact is that the German Army advanced so fast, that even people who tried to run away did not make it.

When my sister and Izak came back, there was no time for rejoicing. The artillery fire started all over again and this time the target was the forest that we were in. Half a night we ran from one tree to the other or from one artillery hole to the other. At times the shots fell so close that we could see the smoke and the pieces flying.

When it was all over about midnight, I found myself alone among a group of strange people. Somewhere in the dark I was separated from my family and I did not know whether they were dead or alive. The next morning a group of people left the forest and went to a nearby town of Radziechow. Since I knew that a brother of my grandfather Joseph lived in that town, I went there too.

It was a whole week later that I met a man I knew who came from the town of Brody who told me that my family is there, and that all are well. He told me that they thought that I was killed in the forest. Many people were killed that night in the forest. It took quite a while until all were found and identified.

FIRST ACTION (THE ROUND UP)

Yom Kippur came early in 1941. The weather was fine, the seasons of the year were following each other as if nothing had happened. So much had happened in the three months since June when the Germans entered our town.

For us the war was over but a more terrible nightmare had begun, and the most terrible part of it was that it was creeping up on us by degrees.

How funny human nature is. It wants to hope, to believe that things won't or can't be that bad, and if somebody dared to look at reality, and spoke up about what would come, nobody believed him, calling him a pessimist and a trouble maker. It was so much easier to believe that some salvation would come from somewhere and that things would turn out all right.

That day all those illusions were shattered. As I was guarding the geese, (this was my job since all the Jews had to work for the Germans, and the geese belonged to the government), my mother, grandmother and sister and brothers came running and said: "We have to hide, because Germans are rounding up Jews." We ran into a barn, and dug ourselves in under the straws and lay there.

So many thoughts went through my mind as I was laying there a whole day.

I remembered the week when we came back from the forest. I stayed in a Radziechow at my granduncle's house not knowing whether my family was alive. Later that week I met a man who finally told me that my mother and family were fine. They went from the forest to the town of Brody.

When we came back to Cholojow, 70% of our town went up in smoke, but our house was still there. We fixed up the bullet holes, put in new windows, and took in another family whose house had burned down. For weeks it was hard to breathe because the air smelled from dead people and animals. Slowly the town was cleaned up, and people went back to their normal lives, but not the Jews.

First we were made to pay big sums of money to the Germans, and then we had to give up our jewelry, (we buried ours in the ground), then our furs, (but we burnt ours).

Then came other torments, like the day three Germans stood in front of the police station shooting at birds. If a Jew happened to walk by, he was shot too. Or the day when they caught five Jews, and they took them away and they

were never seen or heard from again. We lived in constant fear not knowing what the next day will bring.

We were all made to wear white arm bands with a blue Star of David, as a mark of shame, so that everybody would recognize us. Any Jew caught without his armband was shot immediately.

Worst of all was the attitude of the local population. They were at times worse than the Germans. We lived in constant fear, not knowing what the next day will bring. My friends, (children who went to school with me), when they saw Jewish kids in the street they would throw rocks at us or call us all kinds of dirty names, or at best, cross to the other side of the street, so as not to meet a Jew. You could beat up, rob, even kill a Jew. There was no law to protect us.

There were some exceptions among the non-Jewish population but they were so few, that they were afraid to show themselves. Anybody helping a Jew met the same fate as the Jew.

My thoughts were interrupted by a noise in the barn. Two people came in for something. We were afraid to breathe because they might hear us. We heard them say that the Germans left.

When the two people left we decided to come out, but not all at once. Since I was a girl and had blond hair, I was sent out to find out what is going on in the town. I came back one hour later with the news that the Germans left and the remaining Jews are coming back to their homes.

The Germans with the help of the local population took with them 600 Jews, most of them young people. They took them 20 Km into the forest, near Kamionka, made them dig their own graves and shot them all. One girl fell into the grave before the bullet hit her, and since she was in the top layer of the corpses, she somehow crawled out and came back to tell it all.

That was the day when I made my resolutions: I WOULD NOT DIG MY OWN GRAVE, and I would not wait for them to shoot me. If they ever shoot me it would be in the back, because I would be running. The next day they sent 50 people from our town to cover up the graves.

THE SECOND ACTION. (The round-up).

After Yom Kippur a terrible fear fell over our whole Jewish community. I think that the only thing that kept us going, was faith in God. We were all very religious. I remember my mother telling us: "God will help us."

The winter was coming but we did not even care that we were cold and hungry. We kept thinking about the round-up, (the Germans called it 'Action', the round-up of the Jews). We heard every day about round-ups going on in the nearby villages and towns. Now they were not shooting the Jews but putting them on trains and taking them away, to what we thought were labor camps.

They were also rounding up non-Jewish young people and sending them to work in Germany. If you had lots of money you could buy Christian papers stating that you are Ukrainian or Polish. I do not know how they bought those papers. Since we had no money, this did not concern our family. The parents of my friend Frieda got her papers and she was sent to work in Germany, where she died. Unfortunately, she had black hair and beautiful black eyes, and this could have been the reason why she died. I remember her mother telling me, "Serale," (this was my Jewish name), "the Germans would kill all the Jews and nobody would remain alive." When I told my mother what she said, my mother got mad at Mrs. Indek, called her a trouble maker and pessimist. She told me: "Don't believe her, the Germans are not monsters, they are a highly civilized people, they can't stoop so low." When I reminded her what happened on Yom Kippur, she said that it must have been the work of a few criminals, the authorities probably don't even know about it.

Yes, how could my good gentle mother who would not kill a fly (but tried to chase the fly out of the house), how could she comprehend the level of monstrosity the German people had reached? Even my mother knew that the next round-up would come any day.

We heard that in a nearby village the Ukrainian farmer needed a little boy to guard his cows, so my mother sent away my little brother Benjamin, who was about nine years old.

The estate of Count-Badinia was by now taken over by the Germans. The Count never came back. Part of the estate was the brewery, and the buildings where the Count and all his help lived; cows, geese, barns and fields. All the work was now being done by Jews, supervised by Ukrainians.

Because my brother-in-law was still running the brewery, (in Cholojow there was no qualified non -Jew to replace him) my two older brothers were given the job of guarding the cows, and my job was to guard the geese. Since we expected the round-up any day, my younger brother Nachman went with my older brothers, so he wouldn't be home because our house was very close to the police station.

My mother's big worry was my grandmother. By now my grandmother had completely recovered from her nervous breakdown, but she was old and could not run fast, so we were looking for a place to hide her. She became friendly with a Ukrainian family and they found out we had a cow left over from my grandmother's farm. They told my mother that if we would give them our cow, they would hide my grandmother when the round-up comes. We gave them our cow. My grandmother would go there every morning, she would help them with work and come home at night. The only ones left at home was my mother and my youngest sister Schlomche who was seven years old.

The round-up came. As I was guarding the geese, I saw Jewish people running from the village to the forest. I stopped one of them and he told me the round-up had started. I left my geese, ran over to my three brothers. We knew that if my mother got out of the village she would come to us. We waited a long time and still no mother. We just stood there and waited, finally seeing my sister Schlomche running and my mother behind her.

This was the reason they were late: Because we lived so close to the police station, our house was among the first that they entered. They caught my mother and my sister and took them to a place where they gathered all the people. They were surrounded by Ukrainian police and the German SS men. My sister Schlomche understood and knew everything. She decided to run away. When she started running, my mother wanted to stop her, so she ran after her to catch her; and before she realized what was happening she was away from the gathering place. So they kept on running till they came to us.

Our aim was to get to the forest and hide there. By now many people of the local population came out to help the Germans, with axes and pitchforks. They intercepted the fleeing Jews and chased them back to the gathering place.

We ended up among a group of people being herded back to the Germans; like cattle to the slaughter. We were passing a place with many thick bushes, so we crawled into the bushes and hid there. This way we were saved.

When there was nobody around we crawled out and started our run to the nearest forest. We had to hide in the bushes and ditches but we made it to the forest. We had to get in deep into the forest because even in the forest there were local people, (hooligans), looking for Jews. We were there a whole day and a whole night without food and only the clothes we had on. The night was cold, it was October.

The next morning again I was sent to find out if it was safe to return home. I was afraid to go into the village where the Jews lived because by now there were many Ukrainians and Polish hoodlums looting the Jewish homes. I had a friend Janka who was Polish. I met her while guarding the geese. I went to her house. Her father Ludwig went for me to the Jewish part of the village to find out what was going on. When he came back, he told me the looting was almost finished, that some Jews are back, and by late afternoon it would be safe for my family to come home. They gave me some bread, a few potatoes and I went back to the forest. It took me a while to find my family, they were glad to see me and the food. We waited till late in the afternoon, and started our trip back home. We stopped in the brewery and found out that my sister and her husband were safe. They hid in the brewery, but our sister told us that our grandmother was taken away.

Later we found out that the people who took our cow chased my grandmother out of their house just when the round-up was on, and she was taken to the gathering place. My poor gentle grandmother who all her life helped other people had nobody to help her. She died somewhere all alone, and I do not even know where her grave is.

By the time we got to our house it was dark, we got into the house and just sat there in the house, scared and sad, afraid to even put on the lights. We were all upset about our grandmother and about many of our friends and neighbors who were taken away.

All of sudden we heard somebody knocking on the door and trying to open the door. We thought that it was one of the hoodlums who was looting the houses. We just sat there quietly not making a sound.

Then we heard him going to the back of the house, again knocking but then we heard a piercing scream: "Mammy, Mammy where are you?" We recognized the voice of our little brother Benjamin. We all ran outside, and when he saw us all he became very hysterical crying, and we all cried with him.

When he calmed down he said that the people did not want to keep him anymore and they told him to go, but not to go home because his families were

all dead. He said: "I did not believe them. "When you did not open the door I got scared."

My dear brother Benjamin! How did a little kid find his way home from another village about 20 Km. away, on foot? I never knew. Even today, fifty years later, I cannot forget his hysterical crying and his words that he kept on repeating: "They were lying, you are alive!"

My dear brother Benjamin! What an experience for a nine year old kid! My heart still cries for you!

My son Bob and his wife Eileen named their son Benjamin. He and our other grandchildren Rachel, Esther and Morriah, are our pride and joy and they help to soothe our aching hearts. Esther and Morriah are the children of my son Hank and his wife Marnina.

How can I describe life after the second round-up? Many people were missing and we did not know what happened to them. We never heard from them again. There were rumors that they killed the old people and the children, and sent the young people to work.

The winter came and we were cold and hungry. My sister and I were good knitters. We knitted and crocheted sweaters, shawls, socks, mittens, for non-Jewish people, and got in return some potatoes, flour and grain.

My brother-in-law retained his job in the brewery, because they had nobody qualified to replace him. He would sometimes get us some food that he received in trade for vodka. The Germans got a Ukrainian family to move into the brewery, and told my brother-in-law to teach them to take over his job.

The Germans now changed their strategy, appointing a '*Judenrat*' (German, meaning, *a Jewish committee*), to carry out the German demands. There were not many Jews left in Cholojow, and the Germans would from time to time send in an order to the "*Judenrat*," that they needed ten Jews, five Jews, or twenty Jews and the "*Judenrat*" would pick the names of the Jews that had to go. They would give the list to the Ukrainian police who would come and take away those people.

There were also other harassments. We never knew what the next day would bring. The only thing that sustained us was our faith in God, that somehow He would take care of us.

I remember one incident that winter. In Poland, the winters are cold with lots of snowy days. The only way to get around was by sleigh, the Germans had cars. When a German big-shot wanted to go from one town to

the other they would send out Jews to clean up the road for him. All we had were brooms and shovels. When one of those big-shots was passing through our village, a group of Germans went from house to house chasing out the Jews to shovel the snow. Everybody had to go, women, children, old people, even the sick.

One soldier came into our house. Maybe my mother was not fast enough to get out, he started hitting her. I got in between him and my mother, trying to push him away, but he was very tall and I was small. His belt was about my eye level and then I saw the inscription on the buckle: "*Gott ist mit uns*" (German, meaning, *God is with us*). I could not get this out of my mind. How could God be with this brute who was hitting my poor mother, who lived a life of a saint?.

RADZIECHOW GHETTO

Spring came, and rumors began circulating that the Germans are making a Ghetto in the town of Radziechow, a Ghetto meant a few streets in the worst neighborhood, where Jews can live. All the other areas were off limits to Jews. Any Jew caught outside of the Ghetto would be shot. We were told that all the surrounding villages would become '*Juden-frei*' (German, meaning, *free of Jews*). Also our village of Cholojow was to be '*Juden-frei*'. A day was chosen when we all had to go to the Ghetto.

We were scared. In Cholojow we had a little garden and we knew some non-Jews where we could work and earn some food. How are we going to live in a locked up Ghetto? We had to leave the house, the house my father built for us. All we could take was a small bundle of clothing and some bedding and go to a strange place. We had no choice. My mother said: "It is God's will."

Three Jewish families remained in Cholojow and they were given pins to wear. On the pin it said, '*nuzlicher jude*', (German, meaning, *useful Jew*). The three families were: my brother-in-law Izak and my sister Rosa, the only Jewish doctor and his wife, and a baker and his wife.

We got to Radziechow and found a room to live in. We heard again about Actions, round-ups in other ghettos. We knew that this time we would not be able to run to the forest. We had to find a place to hide.

My brother suggested that we dig a hole under the wooden floor. In the daytime we had to go to work into the fields, so we could only dig at night and then to make sure that nobody knew about our hole, we had to hide the dirt and dispose of it so nobody would see. The work was progressing slowly.

When the hole or "bunker" as we called it was half way finished, one morning we heard screams and shots, and we knew the round-up had started. We had no choice but to get into the hole. We just lay there one on top of the other; all seven of us, my mother, my four brothers, my sister Schlomche and I, in the dirt; covered with two wooden floor boards. In the haste, my mother forgot to unlock the door. Soon we heard shouts in German; somebody is trying to open our door. Since the door was locked they broke the window and came in.

There were two men one German and one policeman, we heard the German say, "They are hiding inside. The door was locked from the inside." They turned over the bed, spilled the straw from our bed on our "bunker" hole.

They found some Jews in the attic, someone on the roof, and we heard their screams, their crying and their pleading. Those screams still haunt me today in my nightmares.

The policeman returned to our room with an ax and started breaking up the floor under the bed. Luckily our 'bunker hole' was in front of the door. That was my brother Ira's idea. We were afraid that if he started chopping where we were; he would kill somebody, because we were right under the wooden floor boards. He did not find us.

We just lay there the whole day. There were lots of crying, screaming, shouting and shooting going on the whole day. When night came, all got quiet, we got out of the hole, found some food and went up to the attic. We were still afraid to be in the room. In the morning, some Jews started coming back. Some were saved by Christian friends, some had 'bunker holes' like ours, some were in cellars, some hid in crawling spaces in the walls or attics, but many were taken away, many hundreds. They were put on trains. The whole day we heard horror stories.

There was a mother who smothered her own child. She was in the cellar with other people. She had to stop the baby from crying when the Germans were coming. By the time the Germans left the baby was dead.

There were small children left alone, crying for their parents who were taken away. There were parents whose children somehow got separated and taken away.

We were lucky at least we were still together, but not for long. The people who were caught were put on trains and we never knew what happened to them.

The next day after the Actions, we heard that the Germans were again in the ghetto, but it soon became apparent that they were not interested in the people but in things. They were taking away all the possessions they could find.

When they came to our house, they started cleaning out, my mother pleaded with them to leave her at least one quilt because she still had her six children, The answer was, "*Is macht nicht*" (German, meaning, "*it does not matter*"), "In a few more days you will all be liquidated."

Now the Germans decided that the Ghetto was too big. They made it half the size. Our street was to become, "*Juden-frei*," outside of the Ghetto. Again we had to look for a new place to live. We were sorry to leave our "bunker hole" where we saved our lives. We found a place in the new Ghetto,

a corner in a kitchen. The apartment consisted of one room and a kitchen. on the first floor. There were wall to wall people sleeping there at night. We did not even have a bed, but a board on which we slept at night and in the daytime the board stood against the wall, so people could get to the stove.

To describe the conditions in this Ghetto is simply impossible: No food, no sanitary conditions, no privacy, fear, beatings, hopelessness. On top of all this, they took away my two older brothers. My brother Ira was 22 years old and my brother Eli was 18. In the "*Judenrat*," they told my crying mother, they will be sent to a working camp, where they would have food. We never heard from them again.

It was many years later, after the war, that I found out that my brothers, together with many other young people, were sent to one of the worst death camps called Janowska, near Lvov. Most of the inmates there died of starvation and cruel treatment. My brother Eli was shot on the way from work, when he fell and could not walk anymore.

How my brother Ira died I do not know. I only heard of 50 people who managed to escape. All the others, and there were thousands, were cruelly murdered.

After a few days in the new Ghetto, we realized that our most important need was food. There was no use to look for a place to hide. There was none. We lived on the first floor, with wall to wall people who were dying every day from hunger. The Germans made the Jews build a wall around the Ghetto. There was only one entrance, a gate where there was always a Jewish police man or a German. Some people would sneak out of the Ghetto and trade with the non-Jews. They would give up diamonds for a loaf of bread. Everything was for sale, clothing, jewelry. Nothing was important, but food.

Every day the people that could work would go out of the Ghetto to work in the fields. Those who worked got a bowl of soup once a day and a piece of bread. All others, older people, sick people, children, got nothing. And if they had nothing left to trade, they just died. Every day the '*Judenrat*' would send a wagon through the Ghetto to pick up the dead, and take them out of the Ghetto to be buried.

My mother was sick, and I was the oldest. I realized that it was up to me to do something, otherwise we would all die soon. Since my sister Rosa and her husband still lived in Cholojow, I decided to go to her and see if she could give me some food. Cholojow was 9 Km from Radziechow. Any Jew caught outside the Ghetto was shot. I knew that, but I had no choice. In the

morning when the people were going out of the Ghetto to go to work, I went with them. Once outside of the Ghetto I took off my white armband with the blue star, turned into a side street, found the road that led to Cholojow and went there. I was scared. Every time I saw people I was afraid they would know I am Jewish. Soon I realized that without the armband, I looked like any other non-Jewish girl in the street and nobody bothered me.

Once I got to Cholojow I had to be careful. This was a small village where I grew up, where I went to school and many people knew me. I waited in the field until it got dark, and then went to the brewery, where my sister lived. I told my sister the condition in the Ghetto, she gave me some food, and told me to come back. She would try to get work for me, knitting sweaters where I can earn more food. I slept over one night, I took all the food I could carry, and went back to the Ghetto. I walked the 9 Km. I had to leave my sister's house early in the morning so nobody would see me. I could only get into the Ghetto in the evening, when again I joined the people who were coming back from work.

The next morning I went back to Cholojow. My sister found a family that needed somebody to knit a sweater for them. I slept at my sister's house. Early in the morning I would go to the family where I did my knitting a whole day. They would give me food, and late at night I would go back to sleep to my sister's house. They would keep me hidden a whole day, feed me but they did not want me to sleep there. As soon as I accumulated some grains, flower, bread, sometimes sausages, or some meat, I would sneak into the Ghetto. This way I kept my mother, my two younger brothers and my sister alive.

This went on for a few weeks. I knew it was dangerous, but I did not care. I was happy to be outside of the Ghetto, and I was happy that I could help my family. My sister also was doing all she could, knitting for people. We lived in the brewery. The brewery was not working at that time. I had a place to hide in case the police came at night to look for me. We were sure that we had it all planned, but things seldom work out the way we plan.

It seems that somebody saw me coming home one night and they notified the police. One evening I came back from work to my sister's house. My sister was not home, so I sat down to wait for her. Soon I heard somebody running up the stairs just the way my sister did. I ran to the door and opened it (because my brother-in-law was sleeping). As I opened the door, I saw a Ukrainian policeman. Soon after he came in, the Chief of police came in. The police asked me who I am; I became speechless. They woke up my

brother-in-law, and ask him who I am. He told them, because the Chief of police knew my sister. Soon my sister came in. When she saw the police and me among them, she almost died. We all knew that it meant death for all of us. All I could do is cry hysterically. My sister begged them to let me sleep over the night, and in the morning we would all come to the police station.

Nobody slept that night. We were all thinking of ways to get out of our predicament. In the morning my brother-in-law went to a man who was friends with the Chief of Police. My sister still had a golden watch and she gave it to him. He came back, and told us, that if I go back to the Ghetto, and never come back all would be forgotten. But if I ever come back we would all be dead. Naturally, I left that same day back to the Ghetto.

A gloom fell over our family when I came back to the Ghetto and told them what happened. The little food that I brought with me had to last a long time. We worried what would happen later after the food ran out. I started going out to work. It was the fall, and we were digging up sugar beets. Sometimes I managed to bring home a few sugar beets. It depended on who was at the gate. If it was a Jewish policeman, he usually pretended that he did not see you. Some would just take away the beets for themselves and let you go.

Worst was when there was a German at the gate. Some could be quite mean. There was this incident, when a German saw a woman bring the beets. He asked her why she is stealing the beets. She told him that she has small children at home, and they are hungry. He told her that he wants to see her children. When she took him to her house, to prove to him that she was not lying because she indeed had three kids, This brut just took out a gun and shot and killed all three kids, and then told her "Now you don't have to steal anymore."

The weather was getting cold. In Poland the winters start early. I did not have any warm clothing and still I had to go every day and dig the sugar beets. I went to work for two reasons; first, if you went to work, you got some soup and a piece of bread. Second, if the Jewish police found you in the Ghetto, when you were at the age that you could work, they also could be quite cruel. They used to come in and check the houses. Also from time to time the Germans would come into the Ghetto, and if they found somebody not working, they would shoot them.

I remember one incident. It was in the middle of November, a very cold day. I was in the field with many others. I was shivering; my feet and hands

were numb from the cold. There was a Ukrainian old man supervising us. Something about me must have touched him. He came over and told me that he needs somebody to count and write down how many people come to work, and he wanted me to do it. He saw that my hands were numb. I could not hold a pencil. He took me over to the bonfire, where the Ukrainian supervisors were standing and told me to warm up. He gave me some hot soup and a piece of bread. After I regained some feeling in my hands and feet, he gave me his gloves, and told me to count the people and write it down on a piece of paper. When I finished my job, and it was only 12 o'clock, he told me to go home. He told me which way to go, so as not encounter any Germans.

I came back to the Ghetto, thinking how nice it would be to have half a day to do my laundry. As soon as the Jewish policeman saw me at the gate, he stopped me and asked me, why I am not working. I told him what happened. I don't know whether he believed me or not, but he sent me to scrub the floors at the *Judenrat* building for the rest of the day.

NOVEMBER 30, 1942.

It is July 8, 1977. I am sitting here at "Kutchers" country club. The weather is beautiful. It rained at night and all nature is green. How peaceful it is here. I am trying to write about another day in my life. November 30, 1942, and how hard it is. I would like to forget that day, erase it from my memory. Maybe then it would be possible for me to enjoy a day like today. I can't forget and I feel that I have no right to forget because I am one of the few witnesses left to tell all about it. As far as I know, I am the only one left from about 1500 people who participated in that drama that day. Somebody has to remember them. Maybe if I write it down, I would be able to erase it from my memory. I have tried many times but I could not. I would try again.

It was a cold and dreary day. Not only the weather was dreary but also in our hearts. The day before we were told that our Ghetto Radziechow was to be "*Juden-frei*" (German, meaning, *without Jews*). We were told that we would be transferred to another Ghetto. Many rumors circulated and judging from our previous experiences with the Germans, everything was possible.

Here we were; my sick fragile mother and four children. I was the oldest, my two younger brothers and my little sister 8 years old. We knew that if we ran away from the Ghetto the Christian population would catch us and turn us over to the Gestapo. If we run to the forest we would die from hunger and cold. There was nothing left to do, but wait and see what plans the Germans had for us.

We gathered our meager possessions, some clothing, a few blankets in a bundle, and went to the assembly place in front of the "*Judenrat*." There were horse-drawn wagons waiting. We all got on the wagons. When all the Jews were assembled, we left the Ghetto and proceeded to what we thought would be another ghetto.

Instead we were driven to a place where we all were surrounded by the Ukrainian police and the Gestapo. They started to take away all the possessions, including the clothing.

Rumors spread that we would be taken to the forest and be shot. In desperation, people started to jump off the wagons and ran. We too jumped off our wagon. A police man came over and started hitting my mother, and the shooting started. We all got back on the wagon.

In all this confusion my sister Schlomche started to cry: "Mother I want to live. I don't want to die." My poor mother looked at her and then at me, and

said: "Remember the 'Bunker' (Hole under the floor) we dug for hiding from the Germans in the second Action. That's where we would meet. We can't go all together, but we can try one at a time. She turned to me and said: You, the oldest run first. The children and I will follow." She pushed me off the wagon, and when I hesitated, she yelled at me: "Run my child, I don't want to see your blood." Those were the last words I ever heard my mother say. Since the bullets were flying all around me, there was no time to think. I ran to the bunker and waited there, but nobody came.

I don't know how long I sat there, but when I realized that nobody would come, I came out and went back to the place where I left my mother. There were no more Jews there.

There were still the Ukrainian police, and when one of them saw me, he got hold of me. I begged him to take me to my mother, but he told me that they were taken to the forest to be shot. I asked him what he would do with me. He told me he would take me to the Gestapo. At that point I didn't really care anymore.

He whispered something to another policeman and the three of us started walking. I saw an alley cat ran by. How I envied her. She is free, she has a right to live and I must die. There was no more doubt in my mind, that I would die. The question was only how, and I was determined to make it a bullet in my back, because I would be running, I WILL NOT DIG MY OWN GRAVE. In the meantime I was walking between the two policemen and there was no way to get away.

Instead of taking me to the Gestapo, they took me back to the Ghetto. The Ghetto was full of Germans. They were cleaning out the houses, taking out the furniture and looking for hidden treasures. I finally realized that the two policemen had the same thing in mind. They took me along as an excuse in case they got stopped by the Germans, and they finally found some watches in the house of a Jewish policeman and started to fight over them.

I slipped away from them, changed my coat for another one I found in the second room and ran out of the house. The Ghetto was full of Germans Ukrainiens and some Jewish policemen, who were left to help the Germans, and then they were shot. I was just as afraid of them as of the Germans.

My aim was not really clear. All I knew at the moment was that I had to get out of the Ghetto. I was spotted a few times by Germans, but when they called after me, I did not stop but kept on running. I expected them to shoot at me, but for some reason they did not. Maybe they thought I was a Christian

girl who came to loot or look for things in the Ghetto and before I knew it I was outside of the Ghetto and still alive.

Having accomplished that, I realized that I had to get out of the town, otherwise I would be caught by the police or just by any anti-Semite and I would be back where I started. I picked some deserted streets and ran out of the town. Once outside of the town, I ran in the fields not the roads and I kept on running without direction or plan. Finally I got exhausted and stopped in the middle of a field in the middle of nowhere, not knowing where I was, or where to go, or what to do. I fell on the ground and started to cry.

When I finally calmed down, I realized that the sun was very low on the horizon and it was getting dark. I welcomed the darkness because it would hide me from the people who hated me for being Jewish. I looked on my arm and still had the white band with the Star of David on it. I tore it off and in vengeance, I buried it in the ground.

My poor mother and the children came to my mind. I was sure that they were already all dead. At last for them it was all over. How I longed to be with them.

Then I remembered my sister Rosa. She is still alive. I still had somebody. I would go to her. She was living in the town of Cholojow, only 9 kilometers away. It was with a heavy heart that I decided to go to my sister, because I knew that I can't be with them, that my presence would also endanger their lives. I was hoping only for some consolation and advice. It was a long time before I found my way to Cholojow. I was afraid to walk on the roads or the streets. Instead I walked through the fields and cemeteries. I who was always afraid of ghost and spirits, was now only afraid of living people.

I finally came to the brewery where my sister's apartment was, and found the door open and there was nobody living there anymore. It was now late at night and I was hungry and cold. I realized that my sister was not home and I did not know where she was.

Not far from the brewery lived Ludwig and Rozhka. They were Polish. I worked for them when I used to sneak out from the Ghetto. They were the parents of my friend Janka, I decided to go to them. I don't know what I expected but I had no other choice, I thought maybe they would know what happened to my sister. I knocked on the window, it was late at night and I woke them up.

They were not happy to see me. They told me that the Gestapo came for my sister and brother-in-law that same day the Ghetto was being liquidated, but they did not find them at home, because my sister and brother-in-law went into hiding somewhere, but nobody knows where. They gave me some food and told me to go, because my presence would endanger their lives. I begged them to let me sleep over at least this one night. They were very reluctant but when they saw how exhausted and tired I was, they let me stay just one night with the condition that I leave the next day.

When I got up the next morning, they realized that I cannot leave in the daytime because somebody might see me so they decided to let me stay over the day. In the meantime they gave me a job; to knit a sweater. Since I had no place to go and they wanted me to finish the sweater, they decided to let me stay a whole week. They were poor people, but how beautiful their life seemed to me, compared to the Ghetto life. How I envied my friend Janka. How much I wanted a life like hers.

Sixty-two Km. from Cholojow was the town of Lvov. There was still a Ghetto there. The thought of going to another Ghetto filled me with dread. I hated the life in the Ghetto, The memory of the things that I witnessed there gave me the shivers.

I told my friend Janka to teach me the Polish prayers. I learned a new prayer every day. By the end of the week I knew all the prayers that any Polish girl knew.

The sweater was finished and I was told to go. I told them about the dreadful conditions in the Ghetto and how I did not want to go there, since they wanted very much to get rid of me; Janka's mother told me that she has a sister in Lvov. She gave me the address of her sister, telling me that her sister would take care of me. In truth she never believed that I would even get to Lvov. She even took away all my clothing giving me old and torn peasant clothing. It turned out they were good for me, because now I looked like a real peasant girl.

When night came I was given two loafs of bread wrapped in a kerchief and told to go. When I kept delaying my departure I was thrown out of the house about 2 o'clock in the morning. They told me to go to the train station and take a train to Lvov.

I did as I was told, but when I got to the station I found out that the trains were carrying soldiers only. They were not taking any civilian passengers. When I think now about it I realize that I could not have taken a

train anyway, because I had no money. When one woman started to ask too many questions I sneaked out of the station and went back to the village in order to find a place to hide one more day.

All I was thinking about was surviving one day at a time. I knocked on the doors of about five families that knew me or my family, but none would let me stay. Some did not even let me into the house. Some let me in, asked me a few questions about my family or about the life in the Ghetto and told me to go.

The sun began to come up and I knew that in the daytime I could not walk around in Cholojow which was "*juden-frei*" (without Jews). Any Jew caught in the town was to be shot, but there was no place to go. Nobody would hide me even for that one day.

Then I thought about the grave of my father who died when I was six years old. He was the only thing I had left. I went to the cemetery, lied down on my father's grave.

Everything seemed so hopeless. It seemed to me that the only thing left was to go to the police and let them finish with me, once and for all. After a good cry I fell asleep.

When I woke up it was already daytime. I looked around the cemetery and saw that many stones were turned over, and the fence was gone. The cemetery was not far from town, that was not a safe place for me to be.

I began to think again about the people I knew. Then I remembered one more person; an apprentice who worked for my father. Many years after my father died he still kept coming to our house. He would help with some chores or fix something in the house. He always told us children how good my father was to him. Surely he would help me. Luckily he lived outside of the town. I went through the fields, and arrived at his house. I found his wife and children, but he was not home. His wife told me that he was taken away to Germany to work for the Germans. When I took out my two loafs of bread, the children came all around me. I gave them each a slice of bread and I ate some myself. Then I was told by the mother that I have to go because she has now a boyfriend who is in the police and he would surely report me to the Gestapo.

I left their house as soon as I could and decided to go to the brewery. There was a shack where my brother-in-law kept wood, that was empty. I would hide there.

As I was closing the door from the shack I looked up and saw that I was seen by a kid, who ran away to his house to tell about me. There was no time to waste. I had to find another hiding place fast. I grabbed the kerchief with

my bread, but in the haste the bread fell out. There was no time to look for it in the dark shack. I ran out of the shack, and I saw the big chimney of the brewery. There was a small door leading to the chimney. I crawled in there just in time, because many people came to the shack within minutes. I heard their steps and their voices. They were looking for me a long time but they did not find me.

Inside the chimney was dark. I sat there a long time. Even when it was all quiet again, I was still afraid to go out. I sure know how a fox feels, when the hunters are after it. This was not a game of hide and seeks. My life was at stake, and there was always that thought going through my mind. Why? Why does everybody want me to die? I am not a fox. I am a human being. I never hurt anybody. Human life is supposed to be sacred, but Jews were not considered humans. Even the lowest animal was better off.

The only way to survive was to stop being Jewish. For this I had to; first, get away to a place where nobody knew me. Second, to get papers that would state that I am a Christian, because every Christian had to carry an ID with him. Third, I needed lots of luck.

The fact that I am alive today shows that I had lots of luck and quite a few miracles.

LVOV

Yes, with lots of luck I made it to Lvov. I was now sitting in the room occupied by Mrs. Janush who was Janka's mother's sister. I can still see the small room, one bed, a table and chairs, one crib, two closets, in the corner, a little gas stove. She was a poor widow with a small baby. She made a living by going up to the wall of the Ghetto, buying clothes and other things from the Jews for food and selling it on the market to peasants who came from all around Lvov bringing food. She gave me food and lodging for taking care of the baby while she was gone.

She did not know that I am Jewish. I told her that her sister sent me and she let me stay with her because she needed somebody for the baby. It was my first day, my feet were swollen because I walked 62 Km. I still could not believe that I really made it.

My first piece of luck was when I came to the train station, after crawling out from the chimney. I found outside the station a group of women from Lvov and vicinity, who were talking about going on foot back to Lvov. Since their chances of getting there by train were very slim, I joined them. It was in the middle of the night and it was dark when we walked through my town Cholojow. I was grateful for the darkness that saved me from anybody recognizing me. This was the last time I ever saw my home town, nor do I have any desire to ever see it again. There is nothing left there for me, but bad memories.

I walked next to a middle-aged lady, who carried two heavy bundles. I had only half a loaf of bread tied in a kerchief.

The day before I crawled out from the chimney when it got dark, I was hungry. I went back to the shack to find my bread. All I could find was the half a loaf. I wrapped it in my kerchief and that was all I had now. I asked the old lady with the two heavy bundles if I could help her. She was glad to give me one bundle. Now I looked like all the others and I thought that I am safe. We were already nearing lunch time and my town Cholojow was far behind me.

Then, we met a group of people going to Cholojow and to my horror I saw among them a boy from my town who went to school with me. I tried very hard not to look at him, but he saw me and when he past us he yelled out, "Hey there, the one with the white kerchief is Jewish."

There were about six women in my group and they all looked at me. I was the only one with the white kerchief. I told them that I don't know what he is talking about. They made me recite the prayers. I knew all of them. They asked for my papers, since everybody had to carry identification papers. I told them that I forgot to take mine and left them home. They told me to stay away from them, and ran away from me as fast as they could; all but the little old lady whose bundle I was carrying. She was from a little town 5 km. from Lvov. She knew how to get there, and she needed me to help her carry the bundle and I needed her because I did not know my way, and my fears of being stopped by police or the Gestapo were very real. With her my chances were much better.

We made it to her little town by nightfall. She gave me supper, and let me sleep over in her house, and the next day she told me how to get to Lvov.

Here I was only 5 km from Lvov, a girl from a small town who had never been anywhere. I was scared of the big town. I did not know what to do. Go to the Ghetto or to Janka's Mother's sister.

The thought of the Ghetto gave me the shivers. I remembered the life in the Radziechow Ghetto. Beatings, shootings and deaths were an everyday occurrence in the ghettos. When there were no Germans in the ghetto there were the Jewish policeman picked out by the Germans, who at times were quite cruel. Those were the pictures going through my mind as I was on my way to Lvov.

I had to choose the ghetto or life outside of the ghetto. There was nobody in the ghetto that I knew. Life outside the ghetto was very dangerous. I had no papers that every non-Jew had to carry with him, an ID card with his picture on it. A Jew caught outside the ghetto was shot. At this point even that seemed to be more appealing than life in the ghetto. At least I would not have to watch others suffer. I choose life outside the ghetto. I went to Janka's mother's sister.

Here I am running again. My world fell apart after just a few days, when Mrs. Janush, got a letter from her sister from Cholojow, telling her all about my being Jewish. She was furious with me for not telling her about it. At first she threatened to take me to the Gestapo. After her anger passed she realized that she suspected me of being Jewish all along even before the letter came. For

one, I had no papers. Her suspicion was confirmed the day before the letter came.

On the corner of our street was a kitchen for Jewish workers, who came there twice a day on their way to work and from work, for a meager meal. There was that Jewish doctor that worked in the kitchen. Because of his profession, Mrs. Janush once called him to the house when her baby was sick. He came another time to cook a few potatoes for himself. I was home alone with the baby, since Mrs. Janush would leave in the morning and not come home until evening.

The day before the letter came, the doctor came in with a very sick man. He told me that he has to hide this man for the day, because if he goes to work in his condition, the Germans would shoot him. He said that he will pick him up when the people would be going home from work, before Mrs. Junush comes home.

I knew that I am not supposed to let a Jew stay in her house, but how could I let that man go out and be shot. I cooked for him some hot soup and tried to make him as comfortable as possible. Unfortunately Mrs. Janush came back earlier than usual and when she found my guest she was ready to throw us both out. The doctor came and took the man away.

I never told the doctor that I am Jewish and I never saw him again. I often wonder what happened to him? Did he suspect me of being Jewish, or did he think that he found a good Polish girl?

There was another guest in our house, a young woman named Zosia (Sofia), she was from a village called Zary in the province of Volyn, about 80 Km from Lvov. She brought to Lvov food from her Village and exchanged it for clothing and other valuables that Mrs. Junush bought from the people in the Ghetto. For some reason she did not like Mrs. Junush and she tried to talk me in into going away from Lvov.

What she said was true. Food was scarce in the city, life was easier on a farm where she came from, at least they had food. She gave me the name of her village and told me to come there. I was afraid to go to a place where everybody knew everybody. Here I was home all alone the whole day with a small baby and nobody saw me. In the whole week I did not meet any neighbors or friends of Mrs. Janush.

There was another reason. I knew that the Germans were sometimes catching in the streets of Lvov non-Jewish young people and sending them to work in Germany. Every Christian youth dreaded that, but for me this would

have been salvation; to be able to work no matter how hard, and not to be afraid for my life.

There was one Sunday afternoon when Mrs. Janush gave me time off for a few hours and gave me money to go to the movies. I did not go to the movie, but walked the street hoping to be caught, but the Germans seemed to have taken off too, because after a few hours of walking the streets, I went home. I could not volunteer for work, because I had no papers, but if got caught in the streets, I thought I could tell them that I left my papers home. This was my plan at the time.

Now when I think about it I am not sure it would have worked. My friend Frieda Indek went to Germany. I thought she was the lucky one, because her parents were rich and somehow they managed to buy her Christian papers; their only daughter. I was so sure at the time that she would be safe and yet she never came back. Somehow, somewhere, something went wrong and she was killed.

I was very unhappy that Mrs. Janush discovered my being Jewish before I was caught and sent to Germany, because now I had to go back to the Ghetto or leave Lvov.

ZARY

When I left the house of Mrs. Janush, her advice to me was to go to the ghetto, but somehow I could not go there. The repulsion to the life in the ghetto was so great in me, that anything was better than life in the ghetto.

I kept the money for the movies that Mrs. Janush gave me. I went to the train station, I bought a ticket to the town of Sokal. Because from what Zosia told me, Zary was not too far from the town of Sokal. I had to try life outside the ghetto.

When I got off in Sokal I asked where was the village of Zary, and set out on foot to go there. I walked a whole day. This whole trip is like a dream in my mind. I do not really remember the details. Because as I found out later I had a high temperature and I was very sick. I remember going over a bridge while crossing the river Bug. The river Bug was the border between Germany and Russia from 1939 till 1941. For some reason there were still German guards on the bridge. I remembered talking to the guards, I told them that I am going to visit my aunt in Zary. Somehow they let me go, and late at night I arrived in the house of Zosia in Zary.

Here I am in Zary, a small village with the population of about 200 families located near the river Bug. How well I knew that river: My grandparents used to live near that river in the village called Rokiety about 150 Km up stream. I used to bathe in the river at the age of five or six while holding on to the leg of my aunt Lilly, because I was afraid of the river's swift currents. I remember all the stories of people drowning there, because of the treacherous swirls and holes.

How similar was the village of Zary to the village of Rokiety. The majority of the people were Ukrainians, illiterate and ignorant, very religious and the words of the priest were the law. Technologically this village was hundreds of years behind times. There was no electricity, or any modern machinery, no doctor, no dentist, no newspapers, maybe one or two radios in the whole village. You could tell time only by the position of the moon or the sun. All the people were farmers. Wealth was being measured by the amount of land you had. You had those with no land, so they worked for people who had land, and were paid with food. Life was very simple. Most necessities of life were produced in the village. The only provisions that had to be bought from the outside, were kerosene and salt, and that was being traded for food.

A man would take a bundle of grain, flour, potatoes, eggs or chickens, go to the nearest town where there was a store and come back with salt and kerosene. Kerosene lamps were used to make light at night. Sometimes sugar was bought in the store. This was already a luxury, because they produced their own sweetener from sugar beets. They also had honey from bees that they raised. Money was not necessary, and was not trusted.

I told Zosia that I took her advice and I came because I want to work on a farm. Zosia was a good person. She gave me food, and a place to sleep for a few days, because I was sick with a high temperature and a very bad cold. When I got well she tried to find work for me, but everybody wanted to see my ID papers; I had none. They also objected to my sickly looks. On the farm they needed a strong person. After all the weeks in the ghetto and all that happened to me, I was not that type of person they needed to do the heavy farm work.

And then there was that suspicion that I might be Jewish. I told them that I am an orphan whose parents died, and I lived with a bad aunt. Because there is hunger in that part of Galicia, which was the part of Poland where I came from, I had come to look for work. I told them that I am Polish (because I learned from Janka only the Polish prayers), and when asked to recite the prayers, I passed the test, but still nobody wanted to give me work.

After a few days Zosia told me to go back to Lvov, back to Mrs. Janush. She did not know what I knew, that I cannot go back there. I said good-bye to her, thanked her for her help and left.

Instead of going to Lvov I went to another village called Zabolotci. I walked from house to house looking for work. When the evening came I was hungry and cold. I was at the end of the village. There was a poor small house. I went in and asked if they would let me sleep over the night. There were no hotels or motels in this part of the country. The custom was; if you asked people to let you sleep over, the poorer families would let you in for a small price. I had no money to pay so I asked if I can do something. I noticed that the woman was knitting a sweater. I asked her if I can knit for her.

She gave me the sweater. I sat down to knit while she cooked some potatoes for supper and gave me some too.

Later in the evening a neighbor came by to visit. When she saw me there, she admired my knitting skills, and she wanted to know who I am and what I am doing. When she found out that I cannot find work, she told me she knows a family who owns sheep. They had lots of wool and they would like to have someone like me who knows how to knit.

Next day early in the morning, that neighbor took me to the people whose names were Maria and Ivan and their son Arkade who was 4 years old. They lived in a village called Bieliche.

BIELICHE

Bieliche was a village like Zary, only my new employers did not live in the village. There was a time in Volyn, when farmers who had many small parcels of land could exchange their lands for one big piece of land, but far away from the village. Maria's parents did just that, and they built a three room house on this land. Many other farmers did the same. Their address remained Bieliche but they lived outside of the village. They occupied one room, the middle room was occupied by Maria and her husband and the child, and the third room was occupied by Maria's sister and her husband, (a big anti-Semite), and their two small children. They also had a barn where they stored their grain and hay and a building that housed the livestock. Each family had a cow, two horses, some sheep and some chickens. Each room had a bed, a table, a big bench by the table and a build-in oven and a stove.

The snows came early and we became completely isolated. I saw very few outside people the whole winter. This was a great break for me. Maria, her husband and sons slept in a bed, I slept on the floor. I knitted for them sweaters, shawls, socks, gloves, skirts, from early morning till late at night. I was afraid that when there would be no more knitting they would tell me to go. So on my own, when nobody was in the house, I learned to spin the wool, I learned to milk cows and to do all kinds of chores that are necessary on a farm.

I still remember my first time I tried to milk a cow. I did not know how to hold the pail with my knees. The cow kicked and I spilled half of the milk. I added some water, filled up the pots and nobody knew about it.

I was afraid to tell them that I don't know how to do something. I had the feeling that if I tell them that I don't know how, they would know that I am Jewish.

Somehow I learned everything on my own, just by watching others do it. I was happy to have a place to sleep and food to eat. They were happy with my work. But, they suspected me of being Jewish, because I had no papers and I came in a time when they were liquidating the Jewish Ghettos. In this part of the country there were no more Jews left, they were all killed or hiding.

I told them that as soon as spring comes, I would go home and get my ID papers. I knew that I can't go home or get the papers, but I decided to worry about it when spring comes. What mattered was to live through each day, one day at a time.

Worst was at nights, when I let myself think about my situation, about my family, I could not even cry because that would give me away. Even silent tears running down my face could make the pillow wet. I tried to pretend that I am happy, but something had to give.

I broke out with blisters on my hands, palms and fingers, it is also possible that I was allergic to the wool. This became another source of worry, because I was afraid the people would send me away. I kept on knitting despite the pain. There were no doctors to go to. Maria tried all kinds of home remedies, including witchcraft and nothing helped.

There was one more source of trouble; that was Maria's brother-in-law, who was a great anti-Semite. There was one Jewish couple who was hiding in some place in the village. Somehow he found out about them and informed the Gestapo, and they were taken away and killed. He was proud of that.

He was the one that persisted about my being Jewish. He would ask me all kinds of questions, and I was very much afraid of him.

There were days that I wanted so much to live, because I knew that I still had my aunt Lilly who lived in the USA, and I wanted so much to be able to tell her about the family and about all that happened.

There were other days, when I wished I was dead, that I would not have to worry anymore about ID papers, or my being Jewish.

In one of those days, Maria's brother-in-law came in again to question me.

To his question: "Are you Jewish?" I answered; "Yes, go to the Gestapo and the hell with you." (This was one of those days that I did not care what is going to happen to me). He looked at me in disbelief. His next question was; "Did you have brothers or sisters?" I said "yes: "How many sisters did you have?" I said: "Ten." "How many brothers?" I said: "Twenty." He stopped. And after a while he said: "You are making fun of me. If you were Jewish you would not talk like this to me. "Jews are cowards, you could not be Jewish," and he left me alone.

There was also the time when the Germans wanted young Ukrainian people to go to work in Germany. They were going from house to house and when they found young people they took them with them and sent them to Germany. When I heard about it, my first reaction was "good," I wanted to go to work in Germany. I was not afraid of hard work. When night came and I began to think about it: What if they want to know who I am? What if they asked me about papers? What if they find out that I am Jewish?

When the morning came, and Maria told me: "We have to hide you today, because the Germans are close by," I went to the barn and they piled a lot of straw on top of me. The Germans came, together with the Ukrainian police, and they came to the barn, got pitchforks and they stuck them in the straw, but they did not find me.

When they left, life resumed its normal schedule: I got up in the morning, milked the cows, fed the chickens, pigs and horses, got back to the house, had breakfast with my host family and sat down to knit or crocheted. Breakfast was always potatoes with bacon, or sour cream and cheese. Lunch was a soup, (mostly cabbage soup) with some meat, (mostly pig meat). Supper was usually dairy, bread with butter or bread with cheese, or sour cream. The room was warm and I got plenty to eat. I recovered my health and gained some weight, but the winter was ending and soon there would be spring. When the snow started to melt, Maria told me; I know that you are not Jewish, but we are afraid to keep you, because you have no papers, but we will find you another place to stay.

One day she told me that they found for me a family in another village. A young couple who needs somebody to take care of their baby. They told the other couple so many good things about me that they forgot to ask about the papers. The name of the village was Zabolotci.

ZABOLOTCI

The name of the village was Zabolotci. Olga and Fedka were the names of my new employers, and the baby's name was Oleg, who was three months old. They were considered rich, they had lots of land and Fedka was also the only blacksmith in the village. The village of Zabolotci was next to the village Zary, where my friend Zosia lived. Here in Zabolotci I knew I would not be isolated. I would meet many people and I was scared.

Also I was sure that by now Zosia knows that I am Jewish because she went once a month to Lvov and spoke to Mrs. Janush. What if she hears that I am in Zabolotci and tells everybody that I am Jewish? I decided to go to her and see what happens.

She told me right away: "I know you are Jewish, but don't worry about me, my grandmother was also Jewish." Zosia was a very beautiful young girl also from Galicia. She came to Zary and she married an ugly old man, and by now she already had a baby. She told me that she brought from Lvov a Jewish woman with a child, and they lived in a nearby village. She asked me if I would like to meet that woman. Of course I said, "Yes." We made an appointment and a few days later I was to come to her (Zosia's) house, and the other Jewish woman would come too. I met that woman, she had all the necessary papers for her and her child, a boy. The boy was not circumcised. In that part of the world only Jewish boys were circumcised. She told me that her husband is also on Christian papers but she did not know where he is. When she found out that I had no papers, she told me it is not safe for us to meet, because if one of us is caught, it would be bad for both of us. She was right.

At the time I was thinking she is safe, it is I who might be caught, but a few months later I heard that a Jewish woman with a child was caught and taken to the Gestapo and shot. I do not know the details, how they found out about her; but this was the same woman. I was badly shaken but again I could not show it. While working in the fields one day, there was nobody nearby, I had a good cry.

Otherwise, life in Zabolotci was not bad: I worked very hard, I got up very early before the sun came out. Made a fire in the stove with wood that I brought from the barn. Fetched the potatoes from the cellar, washed them and put them up to cook for the pigs. While the potatoes were cooking, I would milk the cows, feed and clean the horses, let out the chickens, the ducks and geese from their hoops and feed them. We had a nice pond behind the house

where the ducks and the geese would go. When I came back to the house, the potatoes were cooked. I had to drain them, mash them up together with some grains, and this was food for the pigs. By this time Olga and Fedka and the baby would be up. I had to clean up the house and change the baby, while Olga would cook breakfast.

When the baby got a little older, I would hold the baby and while eating my breakfast I would also feed the baby, while chewing some food for the baby. There was no such thing like baby food, so the baby ate what we ate. Olga and I would chew the food and then take it out of our mouths and feed it to the baby. While cooking breakfast Olga also prepared a soup for lunch, with some meat in it. After breakfast we would go to the fields to work.

In the spring there was planting. Everything was done manually because there was no machinery. Later there was weeding and then picking the fruits and vegetables, and cutting the grains and the grass. We cut the grains with a sickle, and it was all hard backbreaking work.

Lunch time we went home for about one hour and then back to work until it got dark. When we came home, we ate supper, washed our legs in the pond and went to sleep. The whole day we walked around barefoot, shoes were saved for the one day, Sunday, when we all dressed up and went to church. Since my shoes were by now full of holes, Olga gave me her shoes to go to the church. She also lent me one of her blouses and a skirt, because I only had my everyday cloths that consisted of one blouse and one skirt made from the coarse homemade linen. Olga gave me a piece of homemade coarse linen and I made my clothes myself.

The first time I went to church I was scared and worried about it a whole week, but I could not show my fears, by now the whole village knew that Olga has a (working) girl from Galicia.

Olga introduced me to another girl from Galicia, from Lvov, her name was Katia and we became friends. I was glad to meet her. Katia was a Ukrainian girl, she came to Volyn because of the hunger in Lvov. Her parents came to visit her and she went home twice a year. Sunday was the only day that we did not work in the fields. Katia took me to meet some of her friends. Little by little I got used to my new life and when nights came I was so tired that I fell asleep and did not have time to worry.

Even sleeping was not safe for me, because one day when I woke up in the morning Olga told me that I was talking in my sleep. She could not understand what I was saying, she asked me if I know German because it

sounded like German. I dismissed it with a joke, but I was scared. I was thinking that I might be talking Yiddish (Jewish), in my sleep. The next day I was afraid to go to sleep but I was so tired that I could not help it. This became another source of my worries. I was always afraid not knowing what the next day would bring: Would the Germans come? Would they ask me for papers? When Olga asked me for papers I told her, that I would go home to my village and get them, when we finished the work in the fields. That was to be in the fall.

When fall came I told them that I found out that Katia would be going back to Lvov in the spring, so I would go with her. I told them that I am afraid to travel by myself. With Katia it would be that much safer. I did not want to think what would happen in the spring, because I knew I had no place to go and I had nowhere to get papers, but I was not thinking that much ahead. The thing was to live through one day at a time, one week, one more month, and take every day as it comes. The worst part was that I had nobody to ask for advice, nobody to confide in.

I worked very hard a whole day, and if the baby cried at night I had to rock the baby back to sleep. I did not mind the hard work, all I wanted is to have some peace and to be allowed to live, but it was not to be.

In the middle of April, we heard about a group of partisans, or underground resistance fighters, called the “Bendera group” or “*Benderowcy*.” The Germans were now afraid to come to the village, because the Bendera men would attack them and sometimes even kill some Germans.

When the Germans first came to Volyn, they were welcomed by the Ukrainian people who hated the Russians. They carried out all the Germans wishes. They became the policemen and also helped the Germans kill the Jews.

The priest in church told the people that the Germans were sent from God, therefore it is the duty of all good Christians to help the Germans kill the Jews, because the Jews killed Jesus Christ. I heard that myself.

The Germans had no love or respect for the Ukrainians; they considered them sub-human, not worthy of any consideration. They took all the young people they could catch and forced them to go to Germany and do slave labor. In the villages they killed and plundered at will. They would come to our village take away any livestock, cows, pigs, horses and grains, or anything they could find. The people buried their grains in the ground and if they knew when the Germans were coming, they would hide their livestock in the forest or in the fields far away from the village.

After the Bendera group was formed, Germans would still come to plunder, but now they would come in force, with tanks and machine-guns. Any young men they would catch, they would either kill or take with them, and nobody heard from them again.

One day I heard the news that my friend Zosia from Zary, together with her baby were killed by a Bendera man, because she insulted him. My feeling was that she was killed because of her Jewish connection. Because when a Bendera man killed a woman because of an insult, he would not kill a Ukrainian infant.

Bendera men once came to our house, in the middle of the night, asking for food. When they saw me sleeping on the floor, they asked, who I am? Olga right away came over to me, put her arms around my shoulder and told them, "This is my sister." I was so grateful to her because if she had told them that I am from Galicia, they would have asked for my ID papers, and that would have been the end for me.

May came, and Katia was going back to Lvov to visit her parents. Olga told me; "Why don't you go back now with Katia?", since my village, where I was born, was not far from Lvov. "Get your papers and come back."

It was so simple to her, what could I say? I said, "Yes." I had to go, but I did not know what would be next. Where should I go? Should I go with Katia and then go to the Ghetto in Lvov?, or should I go with Katia to Lvov and then try to find another job in another village? One thing I realized: I have to go!

Olga prepared a pack of food for me, to take to my aunt. This was the last night before my departure, and I could not fall asleep.

When I finally fell asleep I had very strange dream: I saw my friend Zosia. She came to me and told me; "Don't go to Lvov, it is raining there, a terrible deadly rain, don't go to Lvov." She kept on repeating that. I woke up badly shaken.

I am not superstitious or a believing person, but somehow, all through the war I had the feeling that my father was watching over me. I had a strong feeling that I could not go at this time to Lvov. After liberation I found out that indeed in May of 1943, the Germans were liquidating the Lvov Ghetto and killing all the Jews that were there. Many ran out of the Ghetto but the Gestapo hunted for them in the whole town of Lvov. Since I had no papers, this was no place for me.

What do I do next? What do I tell Olga? What about my papers? By the time the morning came I worked out a plan:

I knew that Olga liked me and she considered me to be a very good worker, and she needed me. I told her that I know for sure that if I go to my aunt now, she would not let me come back before the winter, because she too needs a good worker in the summer. If she does not give me my papers, I would not be able to come back. Therefore I think it would be best if I went to my aunt in the fall. She might not want an extra mouth to feed through the winter, therefore she would send me back right away.

Olga did not want to be a whole summer without me, so she agreed with me. What would I do in the fall? I did not know. By now I had an idea that, if I have no other choice, I can always go to the river Bug (that was only a few miles from us) and drown myself. Somehow that thought gave me peace. I had a way out. This way I could go on one day at a time.

I had friends in the village, many girls my age. On Sunday after church or in the evenings we would meet. Our favorite pastime was singing songs. There was no television, or radios or books, or newspapers. The Ukrainians had many beautiful sad songs, I loved to sing with them. The sad songs were like therapy for me. They also harmonized very well, and when we sang together or solo it was like a beautiful performance.

There was one song that was my favorite, I still remember it. It is a ballad that told the story about: A young girl, an orphan, who was in a strange land far away from her family and she was worried that when she dies her relatives would not even know where her grave is, and nobody would come to visit her grave.

Most of the people in my village were Ukrainians. There were only a few Polish families. The Polish families lived on the grounds of an estate of the former Polish landowner, who ran away when the Russians came. His land was divided among the people. When the Polish landowner lived in this village, he surrounded himself with Polish help. When he ran away, that help (workers) remained, and they continued living on the estate. Since I was Polish and I knew only the Polish prayers, I also made friends with some Polish girls. I also went with them to the Polish church on Sunday, but there were many Sundays when I went to church with Olga.

It was the custom in this village that before Easter, everybody goes to confession. This was one thing that I did not think of asking Janka to tell me how to do, when she was teaching me the Polish prayers. I had to go over to the priest who was a big anti-Semite and talk to him, confess my sins.

When I first heard about it, I told myself, “it is time to go to the river Bug.” The more I thought about it, I developed a plan: I had one Ukrainian friend who was not too bright (little naive). One day I took her aside and I asked her, whether she went to confession. She said of course, “Yes.” I said, “I wonder whether the Ukrainians do it the same way as we Polish people do it. Can you tell me all about it? What do you tell the priest, etc.?” She told me word by word what to tell the priest, what the priest answers, all in the smallest details. Now I knew how to confess to the Ukrainian priest, but I was Polish and I needed to know how the Polish people confess. I could not risk and ask a Polish girl. I worried about it, and days were going by and it was getting nearer to Easter. I was even thinking of not going at all to confession. Let them think I am not too religious. After all I really had no sins to confess.

When I came there (to Zabolotci) I told them that my name is Stanislava, Zwionzek. They called me Stashka, which is a nick-name for Stanislava.

One day I overheard a neighbor asking Olga: “Did Stashka go to confession?” Olga said; “Not yet, but she will go.” Then I heard the neighbor say: “And I am telling you she will not go, because she is Jewish.” Well now I had no choice, I had to go to confession.

It was the last Sunday before Easter, Palm Sunday, I got dressed, I told Olga; “I am going to church with you today, to the Ukrainian church, because my mother was Ukrainian.” (I could not say my father was Ukrainian because I had a Polish name); “Therefore I want to confess to the Ukrainian priest.” Olga was glad that I am half-Ukrainian and she told all her neighbors.

I made my confession to a Ukrainian priest, the same one who told the people that the Germans were sent from God and it is the duty of every Ukrainian to help the Germans kill the Jews.

I must have been scared out of my wits because that whole confession and later accepting the wafer steeped in wine, (which is supposed to be communion), I remember like in a dream.

All I remember is Olga telling the neighbor, (who told her that I am Jewish): “Stashka went to confession, she is half Ukrainian, she is not Jewish.” Little did I realize that incident would two months later save my life.

It was common knowledge in the village that most of the young people belonged to the Bendera groups. On a normal day they lived and worked with their families. Most of them had rifles or guns. There were many graves in our village, of soldiers who died in 1941 when the Germans invaded. They were mostly Russians soldiers and they were buried with their weapons.

The Bendera men dug up those graves to get the weapons and they also got some from the Germans. If Germans came to the village in small groups they would attack them and take away their weapons. If Germans came in force, with tanks and machine guns, the Bendera men would hide in the forest. They met at night and also did their share of killing and looting at night.

One day I think it was June, 1943 as we were ready to go to the fields, we saw a few wagons full of Bendera men, all armed, going past our house. It was so unusual to see armed Bendera men in broad daylight that many people followed them to see what was going on. Olga told me: "Stashka, go ask somebody, what they came for."

I followed the people, because nobody knew what was up. The Bendera people went into the estate where the Polish people lived, and we all followed them. Then they told all the people who don't live in the estate to get out.

There was one guard at the gate, and as we tried to get out he asked everybody whether they are Polish or Ukrainians. I saw that he lets the Ukrainian people go, and tells the Polish people to stay. This Bendera man was not from our village and he did not know me. When he asked me, whether I am Polish I said: "No I am Ukrainian." I spoke both languages fluently. I had no idea at that time what would happen to the Polish people, but being Jewish without papers, I felt it is safer for me to be on the outside.

I ran back to Olga as fast as I could. Half an hour later we heard machine-guns fire. All the Polish people were killed; just like that, for no reason. All the men, women and children. They looted their homes, filled up their wagons and left. I was shocked: "Why did they do it?" The majority of the Ukrainians people took it in stride. After all, they said; "They were Polish." Two nights later we heard that in three Polish villages' people were massacred. All the people were killed. The Bendera people came en masse, killed everybody, but a few men managed to escape.

When the news spread, the Germans came (to the massacred scene) with tanks and machine guns and took away all the livestock: cows, horses, pigs and all the grains and left. Then the Ukrainian people, (average people) came and looted what was left: clothing, chickens, or some tools. When all the looting was finished about two days later, they burned the houses with all the corpses in them.

Olga kept on telling me: "Don't be afraid, you are half Ukrainian so they would not kill you." There were other people like me, and so far they did not touch them.

One Sunday in church the same priest that encouraged the killing of the Jews, said in his sermon: "*Ukraina dla Ukrainchew*" (translation: "Ukraine is for Ukrainian people"), "We will kill all the Pollacks and Jews."

To all those who are half Ukrainians, he told us to come to church on Monday, and convert to the Greek Orthodox faith (the Polish are Roman Catholics) and we would be spared. We all came to church on Monday morning.

As we were going through the process of conversion, the church was surrounded by Bendera men. Rumors spread that they got us here together so they can kill us all. I do not know why, but just before we were about to be finished with the conversion, the Bendera men left.

The priest gave us all Ukrainian names. He gave me the name of Sofia. My Polish second name was Zwionzek, which meant 'Union.' When the priest asked me to write my second name I was afraid to write Zwionzek because in their demented minds they might think that I had some kind of union with the other Polish people, and that would give them an excuse to kill me. So I wrote down, "Swionska", (Zwionska with an "A" at the end is the feminine for Zwionzek, but with an "S" the word had no meaning at all).

My name was now, Sofia Swionska, and I got from the church a piece of paper with my new name and a new religion.

For me finally to have a piece of paper was a tremendous thing. I did not have to go to my town of birth for papers, I thought, I am finally saved, but that was not to be.

Every morning when we got up, we heard about families of converted Polish people who were killed. Anybody that had anything of value was killed and their possessions were taken away by the Bendera bands. My luck was that I had absolutely nothing. The clothes that I wore were made from a homemade piece of linen, which I made myself. I had a pair of old shoes with holes. The whole summer we all walked around barefoot and when winter came Fedka put some patches on my shoes or I wore Olga's old boots. Leather was very scarce. Only when I went to church on Sunday, Olga would let me wear her clothes. She was tall and I was small, her clothes did not fit me, and everybody could see that those clothes were not mine.

The killers were mostly people from the village. They knew who was rich and who was not. They were ordinary men in the daytime, living with their families, working in the fields and at night, like animals going out and killing whole families including women and children, because they did not want any witnesses left.

Unfortunately, when the human beast is released, it cannot stop anymore. When there were no more Polish families to kill, the Bendera men started killing rich Ukrainian families, and taking away their possessions. Since Fedka and his family were considered rich the whole family and I were again afraid of being killed. I knew that if they kill Fedka's family, they would also kill me in order not to leave a witness.

The whole summer we slept in the fields, each time in a different place. Not even their friends knew where.

Now I was not alone, I was part of a family. I especially liked the baby Oleg, he was very attached to me. If Olga and I would go near him he would run to me first, and yet: when he got older and misbehaved, like all children sometimes do, his mother would tell him: "If you misbehave a Jew will come and take you away".

The Jew was the bogeyman, to them. I used to think, this sweet child will grow up hating Jewish people even if he never meets a Jew in his life. The same was true of many Ukrainians in that village.

There was one Jewish family living in that village before the war. I did not hear one bad word against that family. In fact there were many stories about kindness and how helpful that Jewish family was. Somebody in that village was hiding that Jewish family and they (the villagers) were glad that this family was spared, but they were all sure that this Jewish family is the exception, because all the other Jews, those they never knew or saw, are bad.

They truly believed the Jews used blood of Christian children to bake matzos, (crackers), for Passover. I don't know who told them that lie. In the evenings, in the winter, they used to get together, tell stories, brag of their hatred of Jews, some would even brag how they helped the Germans.

Yes, they hated the Jews, but not knowing that I am Jewish they liked me. Olga even risked her life for me. There were many times when German soldiers or even German Gestapo, who were in charge of all the killings, come to the house and when they asked who I am. Olga would put her arms around me and say: "This is my sister," then they asked no more.

I became part of that family. I worked hard, besides taking care of the baby, I worked in the fields and in the garden and the barn. Whatever was asked of me I did. I was afraid to say, I don't know how. I had the feeling that if I say I don't know how to do something, they would know that I am Jewish.

There were times when that was not easy. For example: There was that time when Olga told me to go in the field and thin out the poppy seeds. I never

saw a poppy seed field, I did not know what they looked like. I did not know how to thin them, how much space to leave between them. I could not tell that to Olga, but I remember a neighbor telling Olga that she (the neighbor) already did this. So before going to our poppy seed field, I ran to the neighbor's field, and I looked at what she did and I did the same. This way I learned many things and Olga never knew.

There were people in the village who saw what a good worker I was, wanted me to leave the Leszczuks and go to work for them. They even promised me a pair of shoes and better clothing, but I would not leave my Olga, because I felt a degree of safety with them. They were basically good and honest people, (except when it concerned Jews). They were respected in the village, and because the people knew that they considered me part of the family, I was never abused by strangers.

There was this one time when one of the Bendera boys asked me to meet him at a certain place: There were cases before, when a Bendera boy wanted a girl and if she did not comply, he would shoot her. I understood what it meant, if I don't comply with his wishes he might shoot me.

The way I was brought up, death was preferable to doing what he wanted and of course I did not meet him. I was very scared for the next few days and I still think that his respect for the Leszczuks prevented him from coming the next day, and killing me.

Then a group of Germans came to the village, they saw this boy with a rifle, they took him with them and nobody ever knew what happened to him. Those were the times that gave me the feeling that the spirit of my dead father is watching over me.

On the outside I behaved like any other girl in the village. I had girlfriends, I went to church every Sunday. However, when I was alone in the fields, and I was sure that nobody saw me, I cried. On the outside I smiled, sang songs, learned many Ukrainian songs, but my favorites were the sad songs. I was always scared inside because I never knew what the next day would bring. I had to hide my pain and my fears. I had nobody I could trust or ask for advice.

In my wildest dreams I did not believe that I would survive and be liberated. It was just a matter of seeing what another day would bring. As far as I knew, the whole area occupied by the Germans was '*Juden Frei*,' (German, meaning, *without Jews*). I was the only Jew alive (so I thought). I knew that all the ghettos were liquidated. (We never heard about concentration camps). As far as I knew the Germans were winning the war. This was the spring of 1943.

There were days that I was so tired of the 'Game' that I almost wished that It would end. I was sure that I would die, it was just a matter of a few more days or weeks or at best months.

And yet deep down I wanted so much to live. My aunt Lilly who was like a mother to me, left for the United States in 1937 and I wanted so much to live to see her and tell her all. I still had somebody in this world and that was what kept me going.

One day I was alone in the fields, pulling out the weeds, when I found one plant of wheat in a field of barley. It represented in my mind one Jewish girl in a world of Ukrainians. One solitary lonely figure in a desperate seemingly hopeless predicament, surviving by sheer indestructibility of the human spirit. I could not pull it out, I left it there and from time to time I would come and see if it was still there. Somehow seeing that lonely plant still there made me feel better.

By this time the Bendera group were ruling the village. Sometime months would go by and we did not see any Germans. The Ukrainian police joined the Bendera groups. Now everybody was afraid of them. Most of them were just young hoodlums with guns.

There was this one incident when one of them forced his own father to crawl on his hands and knees in the mud, because he did not give him something. I don't know how well organized they were. I was not involved with them.

One day we were standing in the front yard, when all of a sudden I saw Olga make the sign of the cross three times, (the Ukrainians did that, to ward off bad spirits). I looked on the road ahead and I saw a family walking; a man, a woman and two children. I did not know them. By now I knew almost all the people in the village. I said to Olga: "What is going on? Who are those people?". She pointed to the family and said: "Those are Jews, this is Moishe and his family." This was the Jewish family who had a store in this village before the Germans came. This was the only Jewish family that the whole village liked, because they were nice, honest and helped many people.

Many people missed them because there was no store in the village anymore, and they needed salt, sugar, kerosene or other products they did not produce in the village, they had to walk or go by horse for miles to the nearest town. There was no public transportation. There was a railroad but only between big cities.

Olga was afraid to approach the Jewish family but, another neighbor did, and she talked to them. Moishe told the neighbor; that they came out of hiding

because a Bendera man told them that the Germans are afraid to come to the village, and that the Bendera men would not harm them.

How foolish was that poor man to believe the Bendera man. Because, a few days later another Bendera group took Moishe and his family out to the forest and they shot them all.

By the fall of 1943, rumors reached our village that the Germans are having setbacks, and not all is well on the front. For me this was a ray of sunshine piercing through dark clouds, maybe there is hope for me.

By the beginning of 1944 everybody knew that the Germans are retreating. There were more Germans passing through the village, but this time they were German soldiers not the Gestapo.

One day a group of soldiers came and stayed in our village. Because our village was located on the river Bug, the Germans evidently decided to dig trenches on the other side of the river. Every day, one person from every house had to go out and dig the trenches.

From our house I was sent to do the digging. Everybody had to dig a certain section of the trenches, and you did not go home until you finished your norm. I was the youngest among the diggers and I found the work very hard.

One day I was behind in my work. Most of the people were going home and I still had a lot of digging to do. I was scared that I will be left alone with the soldiers who were guarding us. I worked as hard as I could. Then I heard from above a command: "Get out." I looked up, there was the leader, telling me (in German) to get out from the ditch.

For a minute I froze. My first thought was: he knows I am Jewish. I resigned my self to the worst, but when I came out, he sent in two soldiers with shovels to finish my norm, and told me to go home. I was so confused I did not even thank him, I just left.

That soldier was very strict, nothing escaped his attention. That is why, when one day he came in with his head down and he did not care what was going on around him, we knew that something was wrong. When I got home there was a rumor in the village that the allies had opened a second front, (that was D-DAY). How this rumor came to the village I have no idea. Nobody had a radio or newspapers. Maybe some soldier told somebody.

A few days later all the soldiers left our village and were replaced by another group of soldiers, old men. We were still digging trenches, but those men did not care how much work we did. When time came to go home we all went home together.

One day one of the women said to one soldier; "If we could bury Stalin here in those trenches there would be no more war." We were all shocked when we heard a German soldier say: "Stalin and Hitler too, only then there would be an end to the war."

After we finished digging the trenches the soldiers left. Then another group of soldiers came. They were soldiers who were retreating from the front, with a lot of Ukrainian people who were retreating with them. Those were Ukrainians who collaborated with the Germans. They were afraid of the Russians. This was the spring of 1944.

Different groups of soldiers would come and stay in the village, sleep in the people's houses or the barns and then leave. One of those groups had one commander who had with him a Ukrainian woman who was his girl friend.

They both came into our house under the pretext that she wanted to use the sewing machine (Olga had one). She sat down by the machine while I was in the room trying to put the baby to sleep. The girl was talking to the soldier in German.

Then I heard her say to the soldier: "Look at this girl. She understands German because she is Jewish." He answered: "*Vas?... eine yude!*", ("What?... A Jew!"). I felt a chill go through my body, but I could not show it.

My first impulse was to run, but the German sat near the door, and there was nothing left to do but be calm and go on doing what I was doing, (rocking the baby to sleep). The thoughts that went through my mind were: O' God, why now? When we are so close to liberation. I knew that the Russians are coming and it was only a matter of a few weeks.

Then I heard the German say: "How do you know that she is Jewish?" The girl told him that she was talking to the people in the village and they told her that I came at the time the Germans were liquidating the Jews, that nobody visits me, that I have no relatives and nobody writes to me.

He looked at me for a while then started talking to me in German. I told him that I don't understand. He then spoke to me in Ukrainian, mixing in German words. I only answered when I could understand his Ukrainian. When there were German words I said: "I do not understand."

He then said something funny and they started to laugh so I laughed too. Then he looks at me, and says to the girl in German: "She has the same smile as my sister." He repeated that twice, then he said; "She does not look Jewish, she is not Jewish," and they left.

After they left I began to shake like a leaf. I had to control myself because I could not let anybody see me be afraid. By now there were soldiers all the time, some coming, some leaving. Also the sounds of artillery shots were getting closer and closer. The people in the village were expecting a big battle to take place around the river Bug, where the Germans prepared the trenches.

We were afraid to stay in the village, so we went to Olga's parent's house. They lived near a forest. They lived away from the road and we saw fewer soldiers there, and also less Ukrainian collaborators who were fleeing with the Germans. I was more afraid of them than of the Germans, after my experience with that one Ukrainian girl (with the German boyfriend).

The front line was coming closer and closer. Artillery shells began flying over the village and over our heads, with some landing in the village, in the fields, and forests and killing people. There were lots of German soldiers on the roads. Again we spent a few days in a cellar deep in the ground.

Then one day we heard somebody telling us to get out. It was a Russian patrol, a group of soldiers who wanted to know whether there were Germans in the cellar.

There are no words to describe my feeling when I saw the Russian soldiers. Inside I was very happy but I could not show it. I was finally liberated but was I really free? Who am I now? Where is my whole family? Where are all my friends? Why could they not have lived to see this day? I could not show my feelings. I had to act like all the other people in the village. Their feelings were mixed. They hated the Germans, but they did not exactly love the Russians. I knew that if I tell them now that I am Jewish the people in the village with the help of the Bendera Group would kill me. The soldiers left, because they still had a war to fight.

They (the Russians) set up a civilian government made up of local anti-Semites. They were pro-Russian, but they still hated the Jews.

I did not know of any other Jews. However, I had a fairly good home and I was afraid to leave them and go out on my own. I was very confused. I did not know what to do. I went on with my daily chores as if nothing had changed.

Years later I found out that many Jews who survived the war were killed after liberation by the local Ukrainian people. I lived among them, I knew their feelings about Jews, so how could I trust them with my life? Somehow I did not trust even the Russian soldiers.

I desperately tried to find a Jewish soldier but it was impossible to tell, and I was afraid to ask. I really thought that I am the only Jew alive in this part of Poland.

Once a government was established, they asked for the Ukrainians ages 18 to 40 to come and sign up to go to the army. Most of the young people ran to forest and nobody came to sign up. Most of them would return home at night to sleep. One night, a few weeks after we were liberated, the Russians surrounded the whole village at night, took away all the young people. They even caught some in the forest.

Also my boss Fedka was taken. I think they must have sent him straight to the front lines, because within a week somebody got a notice that their son was killed in battle.

I remained with Olga and the baby, we had an awful lot of work to do, and we became very close. She really needed me now, she was very good to me and we really liked each other, and we got along very well.

I did not know what to do. I felt a loyalty to Olga, how could I leave her now when she needs me; on the other hand I did not know where to go. I could not go on living without a friend or somebody that I could talk to or ask for advice or just be myself and tell the truth.

Because Olga and I were very close like two sisters, I felt that she is the one that I can trust. To me she was the closest person I had in the whole world.

One evening when Olga was crying because she missed her husband, I tried to console her. I told her: "Look you still have your parents, you have brothers and sisters. Look at me I have nobody. My whole family: Mother, brothers, sisters grandmother, grandfather, aunts, uncles, cousins, all my friends, all my neighbors they are all dead." She looked at me not understanding. Because I liked her and I thought I can trust her I told her; "I am Jewish." She was the only close person I had so I told her the truth.

She moved away from me and made the sign of the cross three times, (to ward off an evil spirit, (a superstition). For Olga, all of a sudden I grew horns, I became the devil. Olga was not the same person anymore, she changed completely.

Her first question was: "Why do Jews use blood of Christian children to make Matzos?" I told her; "This is not true, it is a lie, Jews don't even eat the blood of animals. It is against the Jewish law," but she did not believe me. No matter what I said or did, I remained the bogeyman, and there was nothing I could do.

She became very cold to me. I was only the worker that she needed badly. She did not tell the people in the village, I don't know why, whether she was afraid for herself or she really did not want anybody to hurt me. After all, I was still a good worker. Maybe deep inside she still had some feeling for me, but our relationship was changed completely. She would not even let me take care of the baby anymore. I was devastated, I had lost the only person I thought was my friend.

Till this day I can't understand, how a good person can hate somebody so much for no reason. I was loyal and devoted, I did not change! As far as I knew she or her family never had any problems with Jews, her hatred was based on lies.

I should have been used to this because I had seen it happen before, but it still hurt me very much.

Even when I was well established in the USA I wrote to Olga. I wanted to help her because I knew that life in Russia was not easy. I still had feelings for her and her son. My letters never came back (returned), but I got no answers.

Till this day I can't understand how you can hate somebody that you know is a good person, that you loved, and just because you found out that he belongs to a different religion (and suddenly hate him). I still cannot understand it.

I blame the church! Throughout hundreds of years, they ingrained (brain washed) in those poor ignorant people, such a hatred of the Jews, which were based on lies, no amount of reason can ever erase that hate.

A round July of 1944, the Russians put up notices that all women 17 and older who had no children would be mobilized into working battalions, and sent to Russia to work. I was among those.

In a way I was glad, because life with Olga had become very strange, and I was also hoping that in Russia I would find Jewish people. What I did not know is that because of the Bendera groups who wanted an independent Ukraine, our village was considered (by the Russians) a hostile village. The men were sent straight to the front and the women were sent to the worst work under the worst possible conditions.

When I left, they just put us in cattle cars. Olga cried, I don't know why, but once I was in Russia, she never answered my letters. The Russians gave us very little food. All the girls that came with me from my village received packages of food from home. Olga I am sure knew about it but she never sent me anything.

We were taken to a town called Stalino, we all lived in one big room, slept on cots one next to the other. There were about thirty of us. The whole day we worked with shovels cleaning out rubble from houses that were destroyed by bombs. The girls were constantly plotting how to run away back home. I did not participate in their plotting because I had no place to run to.

Somehow they made connections with a Russian man whom they were giving food from their packages. He promised to help them escape. One night they woke me up in the middle of the night, they were all dressed and they told me that the man is coming to take them and I had to come with them.

When I hesitated they said they would choke me to death if I refused to go. I had no choice, I dressed, but, the man never came, and all remained as before. After this incident I realized that somehow I had to get away from this bunch.

When we first arrived I heard a rumor that the director, the boss of our company is Jewish. After the incident with the girls I made an appointment to see that Jewish man under the pretext that I needed shoes, which happened to be the truth.

When I came to his office there were just the two of us. My first sentence was: "I am Jewish." At first he did not believe me, he asked me many questions. How I survived? Whether I had any family? We talked a long time, he asked me whether anybody else knew of my being Jewish. I said: "No." Then he said: "My child, "(he was about sixty years old), "don't tell anybody, they don't like us here either."

I did not tell him about the girls plotting to run away, I did not want to cause trouble.

I asked him to help me to get some courses in bookkeeping, so I can work in the office, because I was very good in math. I also asked him for a pair of shoes. There were no stores in Russia, you could not go out and buy shoes. The company that you worked for, provided the minimum for your basic needs. He gave me a ticket to go to the supply room and pick up shoes and he said that he would see what he can do for me.

When I left him I felt very good. Finally I had somebody I can talk to, somebody I can ask for advice and help, somebody that would not hate me for being Jewish.

But somehow something went wrong. Till this day I can't figure out what happened, because a week later we were called to the office, about twenty girls from my group. I was among them, and we were told that we would be sent to a village near Kharkov, to cut trees in the forest. We did not want to go, it was

December, and we cried and begged the director to let us stay in Stalino. My Jewish boss was there too, he saw me there crying and still he sent us all away to the forest.

Again I was devastated, why did he do that to me? Did he not believe me? Maybe he was afraid that my being Jewish may somehow do him harm. Again I was alone, I also had the feeling that if I did not tell him of my being Jewish, he would not have sent us to the forest. I made up my mind not to trust anybody anymore, and not to tell anybody of being Jewish because if I could not trust a Jew, whom could I trust?

We came to Ivanovka, a little village surrounded by forests, not far from Kharkov. This village was burned down when the front line of the war was there. All the houses were now in the ground, they were called '*Zemlanky*' (Russian, meaning, *in the ground*). A house consisted of one or two rooms, they were dug in the ground, above the ground you could only see a window and the roof. Inside you could only see a window under the ceiling. Those houses were cheap to build and they were warm in the winter. There was no electricity, or plumbing. Water had to be carried in pails from the river. There was a built in fireplace where they cooked their meals. Every house had to take in two workers who worked in the forest.

There were also German prisoners-of-war who worked in the forest. They lived in the church under guard. In the forest at work they were guarded by Russian soldiers.

I, together with another girl, were placed in one of those houses. The other girl, Tania, was working in the kitchen. She was living not far from Kharkov and I liked her, we became friends.

Every morning we would go to the place that the government office was and there was also the kitchen (for all the workers). They would bring out a kettle of hot soup, usually cabbage soup. We were all given canteens and spoons. We formed a line, walked over to the kettle, got our soup and a piece of bread, stood against the wall of the house and ate it; and off we went to the forest to work.

We were divided into groups of four, so called, brigades. We were given one saw and two axes. Two girls would be cutting down the tree. This was an old-fashioned saw, (not electric), one girl was pulling on one side and the other on the other side, until the tree fell down. When the tree was down, the other two girls were chopping off the branches and burning them. When the tree was clear of branches it had to be cut up into certain sizes. Every brigade had to cut down a certain amount of cubic feet of lumber. (So called '*norm,*') if you cut down more

than your norm you would be given rewards in the form of additional food or a pair of shoes or clothing.

The work was very hard, it was December 1944, and the Russian winter was very cold. We were standing waist deep in the snow and working. Every minute of free time that we could find, we ran to the fire where the branches were burning to warm up. Lunch time a sleigh came to the forest with another kettle of soup. This soup was mostly cold by the time it came to us. In the evening we would get one more soup on the way home, and then we would go back to our assigned houses.

When I came home on the first day I was very depressed. I felt that I can not survive this. I was cold hungry and exhausted, every muscle in my body hurt.

It was already six months since I saw the first Russian soldiers and was liberated. Where did it get me? I am still alone, I can not tell anybody that I am Jewish. I did not know where to find Jewish people, and even if I knew, I could not leave my work, because the war was still being fought and we were mobilized into so called working battalions. Leaving your battalion was considered a desertion, punishable just the same way as a soldier who deserted his post. Besides that, in Russia you need a permit, so called '*Komandirovka*,' (permit) to travel. You could not get a ticket on a bus or train without this permit.

Everything looked so hopeless. I started to cry, and then it hit me, things are different now; I can cry, I am not afraid to show my feelings. I am not afraid that tomorrow somebody would find out that I am Jewish and shoot me. They may not like me here, but my life is not in danger. I am not afraid to go to sleep because somebody might hear me talk Jewish in my sleep. I do not have to worry that somebody would ask for my ID papers. My name was still Sofia Swionska, but now I had papers with that name.

I wiped my face and went inside the house. My roommate Tania was waiting for me, She brought home some food from the kitchen for me. When I told her about my work she said; "Don't worry you will get used to it." "*Privikniesz*" (*Russian, meaning, you will get used to it*), later I found out that this was a favorite saying in Russia. "*Privikniesz albo Zdochniesz*." (what that means, you either will get used to it or die). My friend Tania was right, I got used to it.

I worked in the forest a whole month. Having a friend was a new thing for me, she really cared, she brought me home food almost every day. She was kind, and I had somebody to talk to. I told her that my family was killed by the Germans, but I did not tell her that I am Jewish. Many Ukrainian families were

also killed by the Germans. I was afraid that if I tell her that I am Jewish I would lose her.

There were around 700 people in our organization and I was hoping that maybe I would find some Jewish people. There was one older woman who would write down every day who came to work. By the end of the month I was called to the office and told that I would be given the job of writing down the people, because this woman is sick and is leaving.

To this day I don't know why they picked me. There are three possibilities: (1) This older woman who saw me every day may have recommended me. (2) Most of the girls who came with me were either illiterate or had very little schooling, one or two years of school, I had seven years of school. In the office they had records of everybody's education. (3) The Jewish boss from Stalino, the one who sent me to the forest, might have told somebody to help me. (4) maybe, (I thought) that it was my father guarding me.

For me this was a miracle. I got a list of all the people that worked in our organization. In Russia every worker had to tell his nationality, and it was written down next to every name. My first thought was, now I would know who is Jewish.

I looked over the whole list, and unfortunately there was only one name with the words "Yevrey" (Jewish), next to it. He was a middle aged man working in the office. This time I decided to wait and see. I wanted to get to know this man before I tell him that I am Jewish. There may have been others like me (Jewish) because next to my name was written "Ukrainian", and I could not know who they were.

I had to write down every man and woman who came or did not come to work; Including the people who worked in the office, the kitchen, infirmary and in the forest. At first it took me a whole day to do my job. Then I developed a system, instead of going to the forest and looking for every brigade, I found the crossroads where all the people who worked in the forest had to pass. I only had to get there earlier than the people.

After I had all the people in the forest, I would go to the kitchen. Tania knew that I was coming, after all the people were gone (finished their breakfast). Tania always saved for me a good breakfast. I could eat it inside the kitchen by a table, and not outside in the cold. From the kitchen I went to the office to write down the office workers.

I got to know the bookkeepers, all women and one disabled man. There was lots of work for the bookkeepers, all the figuring was being done on abacus beads. When I had finished my work I would go to the office and help the bookkeepers.

At first checking and then doing the figuring. I always was good in arithmetic, I learned how to use the abacus and I liked working there. There was nobody home in the house where I lived, all the people were working, and the room (where I lived) was cold when there was not a fire in the fireplace. Here in the office was warm, these were people who needed my help and I also wanted to get to know the Jewish man.

He was not working much in the office. He would come in the morning, do some paper work and then go to the forest. He was in charge of production. In the afternoon he would sometimes come in again.

When he was not in the office, the other people would sometimes talk about Jews, tell jokes about how Jews are lazy, how they don't want to fight the war, how they are not honest, but when he was in the office, they would not mention Jews. From this I understood that they knew that he is Jewish.

One afternoon he came into the office and tells us: "Would you believe that, people are talking in the forest that I am Jewish." Nobody said a word, they all pretended to be working. I just looked at him, and I was thinking, is it possible that he does not know that it is written "Yevrey" (Jewish), next to his name, on the list of names? Evidently he would like to hide his Jewishness.

I was glad that I never told him about me being Jewish, and I made up my mind not to tell him or anybody else.

I worked like this (on the job) the whole winter. In the beginning of May, the man in charge of shipping and receiving the lumber at the train station was sent to prison for stealing, and they were looking for somebody to replace him. It had to be somebody who was good in math. The bookkeepers in my office recommended me.

I did not want the job, I was afraid, because this was a very responsible job: From the forest the lumber was being transported to a lumber yard at the train station. When the lumber arrived, my job was to figure out how many cubic feet of lumber there was, and whether it corresponds with the shipping invoice, and I had to sign the shipping invoice. This lumber was being loaded on trains and shipped to Kharkov, Stalino and Kramatorsk. I had to figure out how much lumber was shipped, and send along shipping invoices. I also had to keep track of the hours that each worker worked and make out the payroll at the end of each week.

The work was being done manually, without any machinery. We needed lots of people. Many people were stealing pieces of lumber in order to heat their houses, and I was afraid that if they find lumber missing they might accuse me of stealing and send me to prison.

The boss who was in charge of the lumber yard came to talk to me, a man in his sixties. He told me not to be afraid, he would teach me the business and he would make sure that I don't go to prison.

I had no choice, I had to take the job. I moved to another town. (I don't remember the name of that town). As an office worker I was assigned living quarters in a real house, not in the ground. I insisted that Tania come with me. By now we were good friends, she even took me one weekend to her home to meet her parents.

My boss showed me how to document the existing pieces of lumber on the trains and adjust figures to make up for the lumber that was being stolen. Since he had to sign every shipping invoice there was no problem. He also put me in charge of giving out tickets for additional food for workers who exceeded their norm. They were called '*Stachanovcy*,' after a man called Stachanov, who was a famous good worker.

I was also allowed to take for myself any food I needed. He was a good old man who took care of me like a father. He told me that he has three sons in the army and when they come home he wants one of them to marry me. He would sometimes bring me food from his home that his wife sent for me.

It was spring of 1945, the news from the front was very good. The allies were winning the war, Germany was finally getting what it deserved. It was German cities that were being bombed. Everybody was hoping that soon the war would end.

Many months before, I started writing letters to people I knew in my hometown of Cholojow. My first letter went to Janka's parents, Ludwig and Rozhka; I never got an answer. It was later after the war that I found out that Janka's family, because they were Polish, no longer lived in Cholojow. I do not know whether they were killed, because many were killed for being Polish, or they ran away. I looked for them for many years after the war, I even put advertisements in the Polish paper, but I never found them.

I wrote to many others, and finally I wrote a letter to a woman who was a friend of my sister before the war. I wanted to know if my sister or other people from my family are alive, or in general what is going on in my town Cholojow. Did any Jewish people come back?

Every time I sent away a letter I was waiting impatiently for an answer, and when weeks went by and no answer came, I became very discouraged.

The day finally arrived! THE END OF THE WAR!!!

How can I describe that feeling? People were dancing in the streets, kissing and hugging each other and crying. Many were crying about their loved ones who did not live to see this day. There was not one family that did not suffer a loss. Many died as soldiers, many died as Partisans. Many were just shot or injured when the Germans occupied that part of Russia, many died as slave laborers in Germany. I also did my share of crying because so far I was still alone. My loved ones did not live to see this day.

A few days after the celebrations I got a letter from Kamionka Strumilowa, this is a town, 20 km. from Cholojow. I looked at the address and I saw the name of my brother-in-law. I ran out of the office and found a secluded place behind the lumber and started to cry, it was a cry of joy.

When I opened the letter, my sister wrote to me that she and her husband are the only ones who survived, from our family, that her friend from Cholojow brought my letter to her, that they live now in Kamionka, because there are a few Jewish people in Kamionka and the surrounding area, they try to keep together. The Ukrainian anti-Semites are still killing Jews when they find someone alone and unprotected. She also wrote that my brother-in-law has a very good job. He was given this job after the liberation, to reopen all the breweries and start producing Vodka. Now he was in charge of all the breweries in the whole area. She also wrote that through Vodka he made some important connections and they would try to have me released from my work and I should come to them.

This was the first time that I finally felt liberated. I would come back to my family to be Jewish again among Jewish people. I would not have to hide anymore.

I finished reading the letter, I wiped my face and came back to the office. My boss came over and asked me why I was crying? I wanted so much to tell him the truth. He was so good to me, but I was afraid that if I tell him, my whole world would fall apart again, just like with Olga. I could not take that chance. I made up some lie about bad news from a friend. I wrote my sister a letter, telling her; why my name on the envelope is Sofia Swionska, and that nobody knows about my being Jewish, and that there are no Jews where I am now, and I think it would be safer for me (for the time being) to keep my secret.

A few days later I was called to the main office to see a very important man from the party. When I came in, his first question was, who is Serla Barash? This was the first time after so many years that I heard my Jewish name. At first I was surprised, and then I said; "My name is Serla Barash, but because my life was in danger when the Germans were here I had to change my name." I wanted to tell

him the whole story but he stopped me, telling me; "we know all about it." Till this day I can't figure out how he knew and how long he knew. And here I thought that nobody knows.

He told me that the reason he called me in is because papers came from my brother-in-law and sister, signed by important people asking for my release on the basis that I am a Polish citizen and I want to return to Poland.

He asked me whether I like my job. I told him the truth, that I did. Then he told me to sign a paper that I don't want to go to Poland. I told him that I cannot do that, because I want to be with my sister. Then he told me that they would give me a better job, he promised me a glorious future in Russia, but I still did not sign that paper. He told me to think it over, because if I go I would be making a big mistake. All I could think of was, that I want to be with my sister, I want to be with Jewish people, I had to go.

Up until now my work was my life, I liked what I was doing I was good at it. I liked the people I worked with and they liked me. We ate at the company cafeteria, now I was eating at the dining room with all the people who worked in offices and all the bosses and the food was much better. After work I would go back to my living quarters and just sleep over the night there. With the people who lived there (in the house where I lived) we had little contact, because we left early in the morning and came at night just to sleep. When I think about them now I can't even remember them. All I remember is that there were no children.

Tania and I worked six days. On Sunday we did our laundry, washed our hair, did some house cleaning and sometimes went to a movie. We did not have a social life and we did not miss it. Tania had a boyfriend who was in the army and she waited for him. I was not interested in boys because there was nobody that interested me. All the young men were in the army. Wherever I went, the people I worked with were either women or old and disabled men.

I was called again into the main office and was told that I would be released in a few days. Now I had to tell my boss: I told him that I am going to see my sister but I would probably come back. He told me he knows that I would come back, because jobs like mine are hard to get. He even told me that he would not replace me but he would get some temporary help.

While I was waiting for my papers to be ready, I got a letter from my sister telling me that they would be leaving to Poland, and if I came and they are not there, she sent me the address of a friend of hers in Kamionka. I should go to her friend and she would tell me what to do.

This news upset me very much. I wrote my sister a letter, begging her not to leave without me. I was afraid that I would lose her again. I was not sure that she would get the letter in time, because in Russia it took weeks to get a letter from one place to the other.

I went to the main office every day begging them to give me my papers. Finally the day arrived; I got my release papers, I also got a permit, '*Komandirovka*,' to travel to Kamionka. I got some money, severance pay, and I got a lecture to come back.

I told my boss and all my friends that I am leaving, but I would be back. My boss knew that it would take me a few days to get to Kamionka, so he made sure that I took enough food with me. With the help of my boss I got a ticket to Kharkov. From there I had to get a ticket to Lvov, and from Lvov to Kamionka. Tania and some of my co-workers went with me to the station and we said good-bye and I left.

When I got to Kharkov I went to get a ticket to Lvov, I was told to leave my name and come back tomorrow. I looked around me and there were many people like me. There were not enough trains and sometimes it took days to get a ticket. People were staying in the station and waiting. Night came and we slept on benches and on the floor. The floor was very dirty so I found myself a bench and sat there the whole night. The next morning I was among the first in line. By the time the window opened around eleven o'clock, there were people in the hundreds behind me.

I was sure I would get a ticket because I was so close to the window. When the window opened, they asked who has special permits, like war invalids, party people or government employees who had special permits. It took them about two hours to take care of all those people. Then they closed the window and told us no more tickets, come back tomorrow. The next day the same thing. Three nights I slept on a bench, I was getting desperate. My food supply was getting low.

On the fourth day I was talking to a woman sitting next to me, I told her about my problem, and she said to me; "I am going to Lvov too and this invalid would get me my ticket." She pointed to a man. She went over to him and told him about me. He said that for a 100 Rubles his friend would get my ticket. I gave him the money for the ticket and the additional 100 rubles and I got my ticket. The train arrived and I am finally on the train. Trains were slow, stopping in every station. It took me an additional three days, sleeping while sitting on a hard bench until we get to Lvov. I was lucky in Lvov, I got a ticket right away. Kamionka was only 40 km away.

I arrived in Kamionka in the evening. When I got off the train I was told to get fast to my home because in half an hour the curfew starts, and anybody caught in the streets gets arrested. I was not sure whether my sister left for Poland or not. I decided to go to my sister's friend.

I did not know which way to go. I turned to a man to ask directions. When the man started talking, I realized that this is one of my former Ukrainian teachers from Cholojow. When I looked at him I remembered his favorite lecture that he kept on repeating at least once a month: He said, "Remember knowledge is the greatest treasure that you would possess, this is the only thing that would always be with you, nobody can steal it or take it from you. What you learn will always be with you to help you in your life."

When I look back on my life I realize how right he was: Knowing how to knit gave me my first job in Bieliche. Knowing math got me out of the forest in Janovka where I surely would have died. I told him who I am, and I am not sure that he remembered me, but I sure remembered him. He told me which way to go and we went our way because we had to hurry to get to our destination before the curfew.

I got to my sister's friend's house just in time. There I found out that my sister is still in Kamionka, but it was too late to go to her. I slept over the night, (we had no telephones so I could not notify my sister that I arrived). The next morning my sister's friend took me to my sister.

My sister Rosa and brother-in-law Izak were glad to see me. I was hungry and in my sister's house there was plenty of food, so I ate a good breakfast. I was also very tired, after six nights of sleeping on benches.

My sister Rosa married Izak in 1940. She was only 18 years old, very beautiful and from a poor family. Izak was 26 years old, finished a technical school, and was a director in the only brewery in Cholojow and making nice wages. He was quite a catch, and they were very much in love. When the Germans came and all the Jews lost their jobs, they were replaced with non-Jews.

Izak was one of three Jews that remained on their jobs. The other two were; the only doctor in Cholojow, and the baker. When all the Jews were sent to the Ghetto in Radziechow those three Jews and their families remained in Cholojow. They were given papers that said; '*Nutzliche Juden*' (German, meaning, *useful Jew*, or a Jew that is needed). They all knew that their status was temporary, and sooner or later they would not be needed.

Izak knew many non-Jews who worked in the brewery and liked him. Little by little he brought over all his possessions to one Ukrainian man, who promised to hide Izak and my sister. One police man promised Izak that when the order would come to arrest him he would notify him in advance.

The day of November 30, 1942, when the Germans were liquidating the Ghetto Radziechow, because the whole area was to become '*Juden Frei*' (German, meaning, *free of Jews*), The order came to arrest the three Jewish families in Cholojow. The police man kept his promise, he notified Izak and they fled to the house of the man who had all their possessions and promised to hide them. He hid them for about three months, keeping them in the attic above the stall where the cows and horses were kept.

After three months, in the middle of the winter he came in and told them that he is afraid to keep them any longer and if they don't leave he would report them to the Gestapo. My sister was wearing a good pair of boots, he told her to take them off. He did not give them their warm clothing. Before they were leaving, they were in the stall, and one of the horses was covered with an old blanket, my sister begged the man to give her this blanket. He gave it to her.

They left in the middle of the night and ran to the forest. Since my sister had no boots, Izak carried her on his back. The next night they went to another village where Izak knew many people. They found someone who let them stay for a while, but the people were afraid, so they had to keep changing places.

It was easier in the summer because they could hide in the fields, in stacks of hay or in barns. Rosa had Christian ID papers, Izak got them for her because he wanted her to go to Germany to work, but she would not and could not leave him.

Now those papers came in handy. She would go to Ukrainian homes, do some sewing, knitting or other work, earn her food and also food for Izak. In the village where Izak grew up, he met his brother-in-law and then together they decided to go closer to the front lines. This was the time the Russian army was advancing, while the German armies were retreating.

One day in May 1944, they met Russian soldiers on a patrol. My sister ran over to the first soldier and she kissed his horse.

Once they were liberated, Izak right away was given the job of running a brewery. After a few months, he was in charge of all the breweries in the area around Lvov. By the time I came to them, Izak and Rosa had a nice apartment, a three month old baby boy named Victor and a girl as a helpmate.

For Vodka you could get everything in Russia. When I arrived Izak asked me if I had money. I said; "Yes," I had my severance pay. He told me to give it to him for safe keeping.

After a few weeks, I realized that I missed my job, I missed my friend Tania and I decided I would go back to Russia. When I asked Izak for my money he told me that he spent it all on the secondhand dress that he bought for me. They told me not to go back because they soon would be leaving Russia and go to Poland. "Things would be better there." I had no choice, without money I could not go back to my old job in Russia. When I think about it now, I am grateful to Izak for making it impossible for me to go back to Russia, but at the time I was very unhappy.

A few weeks later we left for Poland. We traveled in cattle cars, with many Jewish families and also some Polish families. We traveled for a few days. We arrived to the town of Bytom. It was a town that before 1939 belonged to the Germans. Now the Polish authorities forced many Germans to go to Germany and brought in Polish citizens from the territories that were now occupied by the Russians.

We were assigned an apartment that belonged to a German family that had left. As soon as we were settled, Izak started to look for work in a brewery.

There was no work available. New people were arriving every day but there was no work for Jews. We brought from Russia food, and Izak had some money, so we were OK for the time being, but the future was very uncertain.

We were also faced with the Polish anti-Semitism. Jews were being killed every day. There was even a Pogrom in Kielc. Everybody was looking for a way to get out of Poland. There was no future for us here.

Our hope was that we finally established a contact with our family in the United States. They promised to send us an affidavit, and as soon as we heard that, Izak hired a teacher for us to learn English.

The affidavit arrived and Izak went to Warsaw to the American consulate to find out when we are getting the Visa. He was told that there is a Quota system, that there are so many people who want to go to the USA that it would take five years for us to get a Visa.

We were all devastated when he came home with that news. He fired the English teacher. We all knew that we can't stay in Poland for five years, without jobs and with hatred all around us. We also had no desire to stay there.

Izak now regretted that he left his job in Russia. Everybody was dissatisfied, tempers were short, there was no peace in our home. Life for me became very hard, almost unbearable, to the point that I considered finishing it.

Since there were no rivers nearby, I decided I would throw myself in front of an electric trolley car. Somehow I saw no sense in going on, everything was hopeless. I could have done like many others, got married have children. For what? So they would live in fear like me and someday be killed. There was that one time after an argument with my sister, that I ran to the street where the trolley cars were going and just stood there waiting for one to arrive and kill me.

Evidently it was not my time, because a friend of mine arrived pulled me to the alley and took me home to her parent's house.

I joined a Zionist group: first because I could get English lessons free, then I started taking lessons in Jewish history, history of Zionism and learned about Israel. All of a sudden my life had a purpose. I would go to Israel and fight for a Jewish State.

I told my sister about my plans, she would not hear of it.

One day I told my sister: I am going to live in a kibbutz (A community of young Zionists) and go with them to Israel."

Izak got in touch with his brother in Brazil and he found out that it is much easier to get a visa to Brazil. They decided to go to Brazil. I had no desire to go to Brazil, my sister could not understand that. She forbid me to go to the Kibbutz, I went anyway.

When I joined the Kibbutz, a whole new life opened up for me, I met many boys and girls my age, all Jewish and proud of it. We had many lectures; learning Hebrew, English, Jewish history and history of Zionism. We had lots of discussions, our life had a purpose. The kibbutz was a place for all those people who came back from the camps from Russia and found no relatives and no sympathy or understanding from the local population. When they came to the Kibbutz they found a new family, friends, with the same desire to go and fight for our land. None of us wanted to remain in Poland or in Europe for that matter.

After what happened to us we realized that we had to have a Jewish homeland. We knew that would not be easy. We could not even leave Poland without a Visa. England was only giving very few Visas to Palestine, but somehow we knew that this would not stop us. Our immediate job was to take in all those who wanted to join us. Many came just like me, with just the cloth on their back. Other who had more shared, we became one big family. In the evening we would sit and tell stories, how we survived, and many times we cried together. This was the time when I found out about concentration camps, and what was going on there. Now when I think back on those evenings I realize that this was some sort of self made group therapy that probably helped many of us.

In the spring of 1945 many trains full of Jews were coming back from Russia. The Polish government sent these trains closer to the German border, because many Germans were leaving Poland and going to Germany. We were told that the town of Valbzich needs a kibbutz. Seven people from our Kibbutz, three girls and four boys, were sent to Valbzich to organize a kibbutz there, I was among them.

When we arrived in Valbzich we went to the town hall and told them that we need a house to organize a kibbutz for all those lonely people who will be coming. They assigned us a house that formerly belonged to some Germans who fled to Germany. We also received some money from the Zionist organization, and I was elected treasurer.

When we went through the house we found that in one of the rooms in the top floor lived an old German woman, all the other Germans had gone but she remained. She was old and sick. She reminded me of my grandmother. I wanted to hate her but somehow I could not. After we cooked our first meal I brought some food for her. She was grateful and hungry.

We, the remnants of the German bestiality, ended up feeding and taking care of that lonely old German woman. There were times when I brought food to her, I was looking at pictures of men that were hanging on the walls, thinking they were probably her sons. They might have killed my grandmother, or my mother or other Jews, and yet I could not hate a lonely old woman. She never spoke to us about her past.

The Kibbutz filled up in no time. From seven, we became around seventy. Many young men were being demobilized from the army, they had no homes to come back to, so they came to the Kibbutz. Many came in their military uniform and I gave them money to buy for themselves a civilian suit. Many came even before they were demobilized, to those we had to give new names and send them out of Poland as soon as possible.

By now there was a whole network that operated helping Jews get out of Poland. It was called '*the Bricha*' (Hebrew, meaning, *the Escape*).

We had now in the Kibbutz many men and just a few women. I had some marriage proposals but I was not interested. I was dedicated to the Kibbutz movement. I had good friends, I became especially close to a girl named Sara. She was my age, she liked to read books just like me, and we became close like sisters. She too was very active in the management of the Kibbutz.

After a few months in Valbzich, Sara and I were sent to Chozhov (a town not far from Bytom) to manage a Kibbutz there. Once a large group was established there we were told that finally we would be able to leave Poland.

We could only leave in small groups, it was all very well organized. We went by train to a small village where there was the border between Poland and Czechoslovakia. There were ten people in my group. We were met by a man from the '*Bricha*,' he took us to a Polish home where a Polish man was paid to take us across the border. In the middle of the night we crossed the border, the man went back and left us alone. We were told to go to the train station and take a train to Nachud, and there somebody would meet us.

As we entered the village, where we were supposed to take the train, the Czech police stopped us. I was walking with Sara. When we came to the police station we found the other eight people there. We were all there, they told us that they would send us back to Poland. That meant prison for us for crossing the border illegally. We all started to cry. They gave us breakfast, we were all hungry but nobody would eat, we were very upset. This lasted a whole day. We would not eat lunch and that upset the policemen. They were really very nice, but they had their orders.

Finally in the late afternoon one policeman came and told us that the order came to put us on the train to Nachud. He brought us food and we had a good supper, we were put on the train and in Nachud a man from the '*Bricha*' met us and we continued to Bratislava.

In Bratislava the Jewish community had a home where they gathered all the Jews that were coming. We stayed there a whole week. Five more groups of our people from Chozhov came until there were sixty of us.

In Bratislava we met an American Journalist I. F. Stone, he attached himself to our group. On the day that we were leaving Bratislava, he came in without his military uniform in civilian clothes and told us that he would travel with us. We traveled on trucks to the Austrian border, there again on foot we crossed the border and again on the other side there were trucks waiting for us and they took us to Vienna.

Here again there was a big building called the Rothschild hospital. All I remember is a big room with cots. Our group was assigned to two rooms, the women to a room for women and the men to a room for men. There were many Jewish people here, and there was another group of people from a Kibbutz in Bytom.

Michael Kaplan was among the group from Bytom, but of course I did not know him then.

Vienna was then divided into four zones: One American, one British, one French and one Russian. We stayed in Vienna a few days, in the American zone,

and got a chance to see the city a little. One day a group of us got lost and ended up in the Russian zone. We were lucky to find a Russian soldier with his Austrian girl friend, who took us back to the Rothschild Hospital in the American zone..

One day we were told that we would be going to Germany, to the American zone. In order to get to the American zone we would have to travel through the Russian zone. If the Russians find out that we are Polish Jews, they would send us back to Poland. Therefore it is important that we destroy everything that can link us to Poland. All our documents even pictures that had Polish inscriptions. We would be traveling as Greek Jews. Since nobody knew Greek we were told to speak only Hebrew among ourselves when we met Russians. Those who did not know Hebrew were to recite Hebrew prayers.

On the day that we were leaving, I. F. Stone, the American Journalist showed up again, and again he was traveling with us. This time we went by train, we traveled a whole night. I. F. Stone was sitting with us in our compartment and he wanted to hear our stories, how we survived. It was dark in the compartment and he did not take notes.

Nor did he have a recording device. He just listened. When he published the stories in the newspapers in the USA on July 26, 1946, what he did not remember he made up to make it sound good.

WINDSHEIM

We finally arrived in the town of Windsheim not far from the town of Nuremberg. We were given apartments that formerly belonged to the German army. Every floor had a private bathroom with a bathtub. Our two Kibbutzim from Chozhov and Bytom were given a whole block of buildings together. The boys occupied one side and the girls the other side. There were four people to a room, to us that was luxury. There was a big well-equipped kitchen in the basement and a room where we could do our laundry. The UNRRA, (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration), gave us cots, blankets and pillows. They also gave us rations, food and cigarettes and chocolate. We sold the chocolate and cigarettes and we bought vegetables, fruits and other necessary foods that we were not getting from the UNRRA. Everybody was assigned jobs, some worked in the kitchen, cooking and cleaning up, others were looking for jobs outside of the Kibbutz.

The UNRRA director needed a driver, everybody in the Kibbutz who knew how to drive wanted that job. After extensive interviewing, Michael Kaplan got that job. That was the first time that I had noticed him, when he was pointed out to me by a friend of mine who was very upset that he did not get the job. After that I met Michael at a dance, when he came up and asked me to dance with him.

Soon I left Windsheim. The Zionist organization was organizing a leadership training seminar. From our Kibbutz I was sent to attend that seminar, in Landsberg. They brought in teachers from Palestine and the seminar lasted one month. We were getting lectures from early morning till night. After dinner at night we had discussions. The subjects were: Hebrew, Jewish history, History of Socialism, History of Capitalism, History of Communism, History of Zionism. We also sang songs and danced. It was quite fun and I loved it.

After the month I was sent to a Kibbutz in the French Zone of Germany, it was in Gailingen. It was a place maintained for the '*Bricha*', all the Jews that were going to Palestine through France went through Gailingen. Here we were located in an estate by the river Rhine. On the other side of the river was Switzerland. We had luxurious accommodations with a beautiful orchard full of apples, plums and pears.

There were many German civilians, men and women, also working on the estate. They cooked their meals in the same kitchen that we did. When we came in contact with them, I could not believe my eyes, they were always so humble and accommodating. I was wondering where are those arrogant monsters that I saw in

the Ghetto. Churchill was right when he said; the German is either at your throat or at your feet.

There was a man in Gailingen who had a sister living in Israel. Somehow she got an affidavit from the English for her brother to come to Israel, then Palestine. He showed me the affidavit when he asked me to marry him and told me that as his wife I would be able to go right away and legally to Palestine. There was just one problem I did not love him, so I refused.

While I was in Gailingen the 22nd Zionist congress was being organized in Basel Switzerland. A delegation of 50 people from the Kibbutzim in Germany was invited to attend. From our Kibbutz I was sent.

It was a very memorable experience for me. We all met in Basel, Switzerland. The head of our group was an Israeli man called Icchak. We had a chance to meet many leading Israeli personalities among them David Ben Gurion, Golda Meir, and Tabankin who was then the leader of our movement that was '*Dror*' (Hebrew, meaning, *Freedom*). The city of Basel made quite an impression too. The building where the congress was located was the same where Herzl had lead the first Zionist congress.

When we came back a few weeks later we were told that the Kibbutz in Gailingen would be liquidated because it became very hard to send people to Palestine through France. Now we started sending people through Italy. We were sent back to Windsheim, in Bayern Germany, (in the American zone at the time).

It was a different Windsheim now, many people that I knew left the Kibbutz by now, or got married. The few people that remained in the Kibbutz were now waiting impatiently to go to Palestine. I had many friends and we had a good time. We were going to the movies to dances, always in groups. My friend Sara had a steady boy friend now and she left our group. We still lived in the same room, but when we (the group) went on walks or were sitting around having discussions, she was not with us, and I missed her.

A new friend now joined our group, Michael Kaplan. We got to know each other. Soon I realized that I had feelings for him that I never had before, and he felt the same toward me.

We were told that we would be leaving Windsheim. About seventy of us were put on trucks and went to a town near the Austrian border. There we met other people from other Kibbutzim. All together about 450 people, we crossed the border at night and on foot, with just a bundle of cloth on our backs.

Somehow we were seen by the border police because, they started to shoot but not at us but, over our heads. They wanted us to turn back, but the man from the '*Bricha*' told us to go on, and to run fast. We had to cross a mountain, one of our friends Joseph Ryniecki who was in poor health fell down and could not run. Mike gave me his bundle and he got Joseph on his back and he carried him over the mountain. Because of this we were among the last people to get across the border.

Once on the other side there were trucks waiting for us. There were road blocks set up to stop us, but our drivers who were people from the '*Bricha*' crossed all the road blocks without stopping. Evidently they knew that now in 1947 the Austrian Germans would not dare to shoot at Jews.

We were taken to a forest and hidden there a whole day. At night they came and took us to a gathering camp in Innsbruck. After resting there for a few days we started our trips to Italy. We had to cross the Alps again on foot. We were told to leave most of our belongings and only take the most necessary things and food because the trip would be hard one. Again we were a group of a few hundred people, mostly young women and men. There were among us a few older people and a few children. It was June and the weather was nice. As we started our trip I enjoyed it. We kept on going up and up a mountain and when we got on top, there was another mountain going up again. We finally reached the timber line, after that there was nothing but rocks and sky. We went up so high that we walked on snow. Finally we started going down around eleven o'clock at night when our guide stopped us and told us to find a comfortable place to sleep. We were so tired that we fell asleep on the hard rocks.

Around five o'clock we had to get up and continue our descent. We met the Italian border patrol but they did not stop us. We got into the first Italian village where the '*Bricha*' had a gathering place, a big empty barn. We got some food and we all fell down on the bare floor with our clothes on, and went to sleep.

I don't remember how long we slept, but all of a sudden I felt somebody kicking me and telling me, "Get up." I opened my eyes and saw the barn was full of Italian policemen telling us to get up and go. Soon I realized that they were taking us to back to the border, they wanted us to go back to Austria. The '*Bricha*' guides came with us. The Italian police took us up a mountain where the border was and left us there. We stayed there until it got dark. Then we came down the mountain and back to the barn. When we got up the next morning the police came again, and chased us up the mountain again. Again we stayed there a whole day and at night we came back to the barn. When the Italian police chased us up the mountain again for the third time, they told us that if we come back, they would put us in prison.

Once they left us over the border we realized the '*Bricha*' guides were not with us anymore. There was nothing left (to do) but go back to Austria.

There was nobody to keep the groups together. We all scattered in different directions, and we were all very upset. There were about ten people who knew each other from Windsheim and we kept together. By now, we were very tired and discouraged. We walked and rested, we picked berries for our food and drank water from the mountain streams.

This went on for three days, and on the third day we saw a group of men coming from Austria, they threw us a loaf of bread and continued. We soon realized that they are people from the '*Bricha*.' They got together all the people, took us to a hotel in the mountains, and we stayed there for two weeks. After two weeks we were told that we are going back to Italy. This time when we came down the mountains there were trucks waiting for us. They took us straight to Milano. In Milano there was a gathering camp called Schola Cadorna. We were there only a few days. After a few days we were sent to a Kibbutz in Nonantola.

The Kibbutz in Nonantola was located on a farm. Our '*Madrich*' (Hebrew, meaning, *Instructor and leader*), was Joseph, a man I knew from the kibbutz in Valbzhich. When he came to us to Valbzhich straight from the army, I had given him money to buy himself a civilian suit. Now he had a wife, fancy clothes, fancy expensive watch and expensive jewelry. I was wondering where did he get all that money? While I was in Germany in the Kibbutz, I was receiving packages and money from my family in the United States. I bought for myself a cheap watch, a pair of shoes and the rest of it I donated to the kibbutz. I always believed in sharing, because the Kibbutz was supposed to be a family.

Here in Nonantola everybody was for himself. Michael had a camera, as we were traveling he took pictures. He wanted to develop the pictures not only for himself but he felt that those pictures had historical value. He was told that the kibbutz had no money for that. Even the food in the Kibbutz was very bad.

We could not go to Palestine because this was the time when every boat was intercepted by the British and sent to Cyprus. We could not work in Italy because only people belonging to unions could work. As a transit immigrant we could not join a union. Michael was getting letters from a friend in Paris telling him that in France he got work, advising us to come to France. I also got a letter from my sister that she and her family are in France in Paris waiting to get Visas to go to Brazil. Michael and I were now talking about getting married. I wanted very much that my only sister be at my wedding. We decided to go to France.

First we had to leave the Kibbutz and get to Milano. Michael had some money that he brought from Germany, he did not give everything to the Kibbutz as I did. In Milano we found a guy who said that for thirty dollars he would take us across the border to France. We sold our clothes and together with the money that Mike had, we had only \$27. Michael found a friend in Milano, David Zukerman, they were together during the war. This friend lent him five dollars. Mike went to the guide and told him that we have the money, and the guide, told us the day that we would leave.

We met the guide, who was actually a smuggler, at the train station. We went by train to the French border, and in a pouring rain crawling over sewer pipes we crossed the border on foot, and arrived in the town of Nice. He took us to a hotel where they did not ask questions, and the Jewish Federation paid the bill. We arrived in France with only the clothes on our backs and two dollars in our pockets, not knowing a word of French. He left us in the hotel and told us to go the next day to the '*Coza Sor*,' that was the Jewish Federation of France, and they would provide for us transportation to Paris.

When we got the next day to the '*Coza Sor*,' the doors were locked, because it was Saturday. The whole day we were sitting in the hotel not knowing even how to go out and buy some food. Sunday morning when we got to the '*Coza Sor*,' they gave us an address where we can get breakfast. They told us they could not send us to Paris because the police there are very strict, if they catch the illegal immigrant at the station they would send us back to Poland. Their advice was for us to go to Lyon where our chances were better. We met another couple in the '*Coza Sor*,' and together we got on the train and went to Lyon.

We did not know a soul there. We went straight to the '*Coza Sor*' in Lyon. They sent us to a hotel and they paid for us and also gave us coupons to a restaurant where we could get food. We were asking for work, this was not so easy because there were many people arriving every day. They promised to help us get all the necessary papers to make it legal for us to work. We met at the '*Coza Sor*,' many other people who arrived before us, some who were already working. This way Michael found a job in a pocketbook factory. The next day the boss found out that he does not have the necessary papers so he paid him very little.

I was desperately looking for work, but I had no trade I knew how to sew by hand with a needle so I went to tailors' houses. When they asked me if I knew how to finish off a garment, I said "No, but I am willing to learn." Nobody wanted to teach me. There were many people looking for work, many with experience.

Finally after two weeks of rejections I went to one place and told them that I am an experienced finisher, they accepted me.

I was introduced to the Foreman who gave me a coat with a separate lining. The coat had to be finished off by hand and the lining sewed in by hand. He took me up to the second floor to a room where two other finishers were sitting and left me. I looked at the coat and the lining not knowing what to do with them.

One of the finishers was an older French woman, she saw right away that I am not a finisher. She came over and showed me step by step what to do. We were working piece work, she wasted a lot of time teaching me, but she never told my boss. Till this day I cannot forget her.

We knew that after a month the '*Coza Sor*' would not pay for us anymore and we could not possibly afford to stay in a hotel. We had to find an apartment that we could afford. We finally found a little attic room. The rent was cheap but, in order to move in we had to get married, (this was the way things were then). We went to a Rabbi who said that by French law we had to first get a marriage certificate in town hall. When we went to the town hall, they told us that we had to live in France a whole year before we can get married. Since we were only two weeks in France they advised us to go to the Polish embassy and get the marriage certificate from them. When we went to the Polish embassy they told us that in order to get a marriage certificate we first had to get a Polish passport. The price for two Polish passports was 25,000 Franks, about a 100 Dollars. This was an impossible sum of money for us.

In the meantime Michael found a cousin of his, Roman Wacks, living in Lyon. One evening while visiting him we told him the story of our marriage problems. One of the people there was a religious Jew and he told us that in Jewish law, any religious Jew can marry us and that he would do it. Michael borrowed five Dollars from his cousin, bought me a gold wedding band and we finally got married.

We worked a whole week to clean out the garbage in our little attic room to make it livable. There was a bed, a small table and two chairs and a small closet. There was no stove, the toilet was three flights down. Michael found an old stove in the streets that somebody threw out. He fixed it up, it had only one burner and you needed coal to cook on it.

This was November 1947, everything in France was rationed. You needed a card to buy bread or meat or coal. In order to get the ration card you had to show your papers, since we still had no papers, we could not get ration cards. Even on the black market you could not buy things, because if the store keeper did not know you he would not sell to you.

The French woman, the finisher, somehow knew all this. And without being able to talk to each other she went with me at lunch time, (in France we used to have two hours for lunch), she went with me to her baker, to her butcher, to her coal man and introduced me. Now when I got paid I could buy bread and meat. In order to save money, Michael used to bring home from the factory shavings of leather and I cooked with this instead of coal.

In the beginning we both worked very hard and we barely made enough money to eat and pay the rent for that little room. Through the '*Coza Sor*' we finally got ID papers and working permits. I was getting really fast as a finisher, and since I was working piece work and working from early morning till late at night, six days a week, we managed to save up a little money for the train fare and we went to see my sister in Paris, and also Michael's friend.

While in Paris Michael found two other cousins of his: Aizek and Don Baum and their families. Aizek was in France since before the war. Don and his wife Frania and their baby Bella came after the war. They were all living together in one room. They were very nice to us, they took off the mattress from the bed put it on the floor and made a place for us to sleep, because they knew that we cannot afford a hotel. My sister Rosa and Izak and the baby Victor stayed in a hotel and they already had the Visa to go to Brazil. We spent a few days with them and came back to Lyon.

Now that I was already an experienced finisher, I got an offer for a job that paid better than the one I had, so I changed jobs. I wanted to take the French woman with me but, she would not go. This time I worked in a small place, there was only the owner Mr. Schwartz and his wife, one operator and two finishers. He paid more per coat but he was very demanding. The work had to be perfect, for one stitch out of place he would open up the whole lining and made me redo it. I worked there from six o'clock in the morning till eleven at o'clock at night.

When I got home at eleven thirty, I had to cook my meal for the next day, on the one burner stove. In France we ate the main meal at lunch time. I worked six days, the only day off, Sunday, I had to do our laundry by hand, there were no washing machines, clean the room, scrub the wooden floor and sometimes we managed to go to a movie. After one year I lost 13 kilos, (29 pounds) and I always felt very tired.

Things improved when I met a man from Kalish, the same town where Michael came from. He was a tailor too, he came before the war. He offered me a job, his name was Sender Szutzer. I was the only finisher that he had and he liked my work very much. By now I was very good and fast. He and Mike became

friends. He had an extra one room-apartment near his home, and he offered it to us. It was a regular furnished room with a toilet and two burner gas stoves. Compared to what I had before this was luxury. He lent Mike his son's bike, so Mike had transportation to go to work. He had a car. On weekends he would take us with him to the beach, to the park or movies. His wife Paulette would invite us many times to have dinner with them. She was a very good cook and from her I learned how to cook French dishes and make tasty salads. When it got slow and he had no finishing work for me, he taught me how to sew on an electric sewing machine, how to make pockets, button holes, put in sleeves. He was a very good tailor and I learned a lot from him. While he was teaching me he paid me by the hour because he knew that I cannot afford to be without wages. The money that we were both making while working very hard barely lasted from one payroll to the other.

When I wrote to my family in the USA that we got married, they all got together, my aunt Lilly, my aunt Betty, uncle Abraham, and they sent us a wedding gift of 200 dollars. To us this was a fortune. For 50 Dollars we bought some badly needed clothing and with the remaining 150 dollars we bought a used sewing machine. A few months later we received another 100 dollars. Just then Michael met Hershel Baum who was on his way to Israel and he told us that Michael's brother, Mendel cannot leave Poland because he has no money. Right away we sent the whole 100 dollars to Mendel in Poland.

This was the year 1948, we had a country, Israel, and everybody could go there. We wanted very much to go too. We were told that it is very hard to make a living in Israel. Many people tried to save up a little money in France, and than go to Israel. We decided to do the same.

In the meantime Mendel and his wife Eva and two small boys David and Mark went to Israel. They wrote to us very sad letters, they were in a retention camp. We started getting packages of food from the USA, and many times we just changed the address and the packages went to Israel. Michael's cousin Roman used to joke, he said why don't you send Mendel's address to USA so the packages would go directly to Mendel and you would save postage.

Our family also sent us affidavits to come to Canada because they said in Canada it is easier to make a living than in France. When we got to the Canadian consulate he rejected us. His excuse was, that Michael was nearsighted; the truth was he was an anti-Semite.

Then we got papers to come to the USA on a student visa. Michael went to Paris to take care of all the formalities. He stayed in Paris a whole week. We did

not get the student visas, and when he came back he found out that he had lost his job.

Since we had the sewing machine we decided to try to take work home. Michael knew how to use a sewing machine and I considered myself a tailor. He started looking for work telling everybody that he is a tailor.

His first experiment was men's pants. I could not stop working so I helped him only after work. I worked at my job from 6 am 8 PM, I would come home, eat something and sit down to do the work that Mike did not know how to do, till 2 or 3 AM. In spite of our best efforts the pants were a disaster. He never got any more work (from that person).

His next experiment was men's trench coats. Somehow they came out better. Then we started making men's fur lined winter coats. We became experienced and started making money. I quit my job and we rented another sewing machine. We worked day and night and in three months we saved up more money than we made in a whole year working for others.

Now that we had some money we started to look for a decent apartment. In Lyon the rent was very cheap, but in order to get an apartment you had to pay a lot of money to the people who were leaving the apartment. It was almost like buying an apartment because when you left the apartment you usually got the money back. We found an apartment, with a bedroom, a living room, a dining room and a big room where we could put our sewing machines, a cutting table and a very small kitchenette. The toilet we had to share with three more families, and it was one flight down. No bathroom, the apartment was on the third floor walk up, light and airy. By French standards at the time, this was a beautiful apartment. We paid 500 dollars for the apartment and the furniture. We bought two more sewing machines, took in a French girl to work with us and started making money.

By now we were already more than one year in France. We took two witnesses, and went to the town hall to get legally married. This time I had a place to bring home my witnesses and I cooked for them a fine dinner. I also got from them two wedding gifts: A photo album and a table cloth. The album I still have, the table cloth fell apart. We started going on vacations to Aix les Bains, Chatel Guyon, and going to night clubs and to cafes. We had many friends and it looked like we finally made it. We went to Paris a few times. We were still thinking of going to Israel but first we wanted to save up enough money so we would not have to struggle like we did in the beginning in France.

We finally had a normal life in France. We had by now three sewing machines, a girl working with us, and we had plenty of work. We worked hard but

we did not mind that. We were both used to hard work. Now we finally had something to show for it. We had a comfortable life but we also saved as much as we could because we were still thinking of going to Israel. We gave up the idea of going to the USA. I wrote my aunt Lilly and told her not to send any more affidavits because we decided to stay in France until we felt financially secure enough to go to Israel. My uncle Charles was a Zionist. My aunt Lilly agreed with me and wrote to me that my uncle Charles thinks that this is a very sound idea.

Four years went by. In 1950, President Truman signed a declaration to let into the United States about 50 or 100 thousand refugees from Europe, (I am not sure about the exact numbers). Somehow my aunt Betty found out about it. She went to the H.I.E.S. (Hebrew International Emigration Society), and gotten affidavits for Mike and me to come to the USA. She did not write to me about it because we seldom wrote to each other. Most of my correspondence was with Lilly; I remembered her from home, aunt Betty I never knew.

One day I got a big envelope from my aunt Betty, I looked inside and recognized right away the affidavits. There was a letter telling me to send this affidavit to the American Consulate. My first thought was: "Here we go again." We will spend money and time and we will be rejected like before. We did not want to go through another rejection. I wrote to my aunt Lilly about the affidavit asking her advice; on what should we do? She wrote back to me telling me to put away the affidavit for an "afikoman." (Jewish, meaning, *forget about it, don't send it to the Consulate*). That was what I did, and forgot about the whole thing.

Two months later I got a letter from the American Consulate asking us to come to Marseilles and pick up our visa to the USA. It turned out that the H.I.A.S. (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), sent a copy of our affidavit to the American Consulate. Mike and I looked at each other not knowing what to do. Finally Mike said: "I am sure they will find an excuse not to give us a visa. We had never been in Marseilles. What did we have to lose? Let's make a trip to Marseilles and then if they will reject us, then we will not have any regrets. We will know that we tried, and if they give us a visa we will have time to decide later what to do".

We went to Marseilles, our first visit was to the assigned doctor (by the Consulate). All he did is ask us; "Are you healthy," which we were, so we said: "Yes." He gave us a paper and told us to go to the US Embassy. When we came to the US Embassy we were called to an office where a man asked us a few questions, then said; "Do you swear that you will be good citizens?" We said; "Yes." Then he said; "Give me your passport and I will stamp in your visa." Mike and I could

not believe our ears, we just stood there. We told the consul we have no passports, we did not expect to get a visa. Then he said; "Send me your passports and when I get them I will stamp in the visa. You have three months to get ready for the trip."

We walked out of the Embassy and we were both in a daze. What do we do now? Here in France we had already established a comfortable life for ourselves, we spoke the language fluently. How do you give it all up and go to a new country where we have to start all over again: Learn a new language, make new friends, find a way to make a living. On the plus side, in the United States we had a loving family waiting for us: They were my mother's three sisters; Sara, Betty, and of course Lilly. There were also their husbands, and children and there was also my mother's brother; uncle Abraham. There were also two of my grandfather Joseph brothers; uncle Chaim and uncle Julius and their families. there were also other cousins that I did not even know at that time, but I got to know them after I came to the US. These were the main reasons for me to go to the USA. I wanted so much to have a family; I had nobody in France. All my life I dreamed that someday I will go to the USA. How could we say no now? We had some money now, over six thousand dollars. In France this was a lot of money. We had to try. We could always come back to France if things did not work out in the United States. With that in mind we started liquidating our assets: Sold the apartment, made for ourselves a refugee passport, sent them to the American Council and as soon as we got the visas we were ready to leave.

On May 1, 1951 we left Lyon, and went to Paris where we stayed one week. Then we went to Le Havre where we took the ship S.S. Washington. We traveled seven days on the ship because we had a stop-over in Canada.

On May 15, 1951 we arrived in New York. As we were ready to disembark a man from H.I.A.S. called our names. He told us that my family was waiting for us. As soon as we got off, we saw uncle Abe and aunt Lilly. I recognized them right away. There were also aunt Betty and uncle Jacob, and uncle Charles. They were all there waiting for us. I cannot describe that feeling, to have people that love you, wait for you. That was something new to me.

We went to the house of my aunt Lilly. She lived in a one family house near Prospect park, and also near the Botanical garden. By American standards this was an average home. To me it was the most beautiful house I had ever seen. She also had a television set, something I had never seen before. Since the set was in the den where we slept the first night, Mike and I watched television the whole night. We did not understand English but somehow we understood what was going on. Lilly

also had two beautiful boys, Jerome who was four years old and Albert who was two years old. Mike and I fell in love with them.

Since we had money we did not want to be a burden on our family. I asked Lilly to help me find an apartment. It was not easy to get an apartment, so Lilly found for us a furnished room. One block away from Lilly lived Mrs. Shwadron, an old woman alone in a two bedroom apartment. She agreed to rent us one bedroom with kitchen privileges.

Mike wanted to go to work right away. A friend of uncle Charles, David Leventhal, found him a job as an operator in a big clothing factory in Manhattan.

The first weekend in the US we were invited to the house of my aunt Betty to meet her family. I met my cousins, Molly, Ruthy and Allen. Molly was my age, Ruth was four years younger, Allen about eleven years old. Since Lyon is the silk center of France I brought for my cousins silk scarves, and a set of Limoge dishes for my aunt.

With Ruth and Allen all was well. Molly was another story. From the first day I sensed a hostility. It took me many years to understand her. To her I was a disappointment. She expected a poor girl in rags, ignorant and stupid. Since I lived four and half years in France and worked in the clothing line, I was well dressed, I did not have a lot of clothing, but whatever I had was well made and of good quality. Years later Ruth told me, "We wanted to give you some of our old clothes, but here you walk-in so well dressed". All I wanted from my family; was a little understanding and warmth. I did not want any material things, and most of all I did not want any pity.

My uncle Jacob was the owner of two big apartments buildings. Since Lilly told me that it will be hard to get an apartment, I asked uncle Jacob if he could rent us an apartment, since we had the money and we would pay him rent like everybody else. He told us that he has no vacancies. Years later I found out that he did not want any family members living in his buildings.

On the first day that Mike went to work, the glitter of the "Goldene Medina." (Yiddish, meaning, *Golden land*), began to fade. He came home very upset. The factory was hot and dirty, and he had to work piece work. The ride to work in the subway was an experience he was not used to. He had to stand for a half hour packed like sardines in hot and humid cars. After a few days of work in the factory he began to talk about going to business on his own. He was told that to do that you need a lot of money and know the language. Our six thousand dollars may have been a lot of money in France but here it was peanuts.

After one month Mike decided to go back to France. For me this was a difficult problem, I liked the USA, mostly because I had family here. I begged Mike to wait a little longer. We decided to save as much as we can so we could go into business. I went to work in the same factory. Mike was used to being his own boss and it was hard for him to work for somebody else.

Our bosses were the three Birnbaum brothers, very difficult people to work for. The factory was a real sweatshop; no air-conditioning, not even one fan in a loft of three hundred people working piece work in the summer heat. There were days when ambulances were taking away people who passed out while working by the machines.

In the meantime the relations between US and Russia were getting worse every day, There was talk of another war in Europe. This was the deciding factor for Mike. He decided to stay five years in the USA until we become citizens, and then go back to France. If there would be a war in Europe, then as US citizens we could always come back here.

By the time the five years came around and we became US citizens, we already had our own business, we knew the English language, but most of all, we had two adorable boys, Bob and Henry who were our pride and joy, who gave us a reason for living and a new outlook on life. But that will be my next story.

END



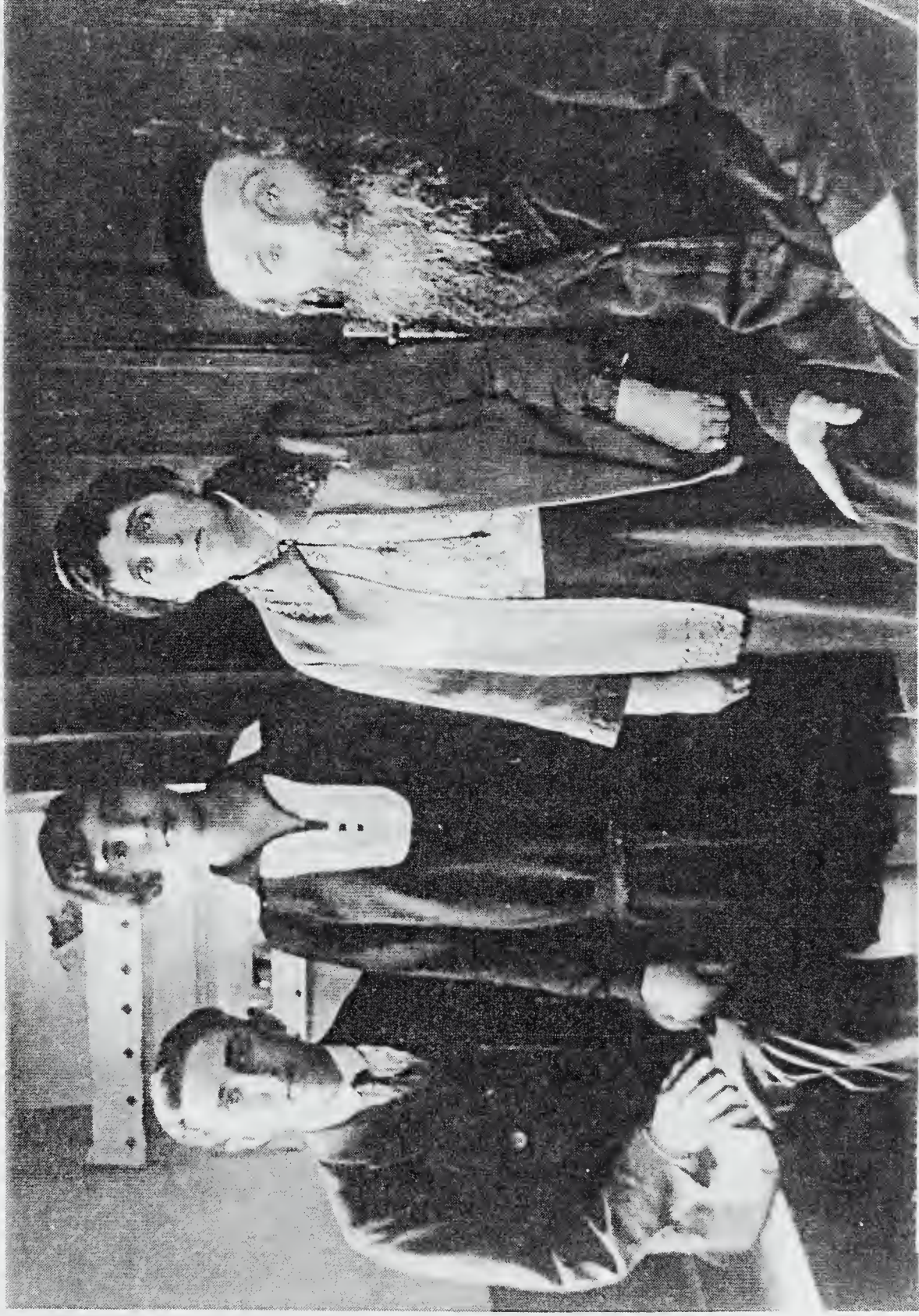


**Sonia and Michael Kaplan
with sons Robert and Henry 1960**

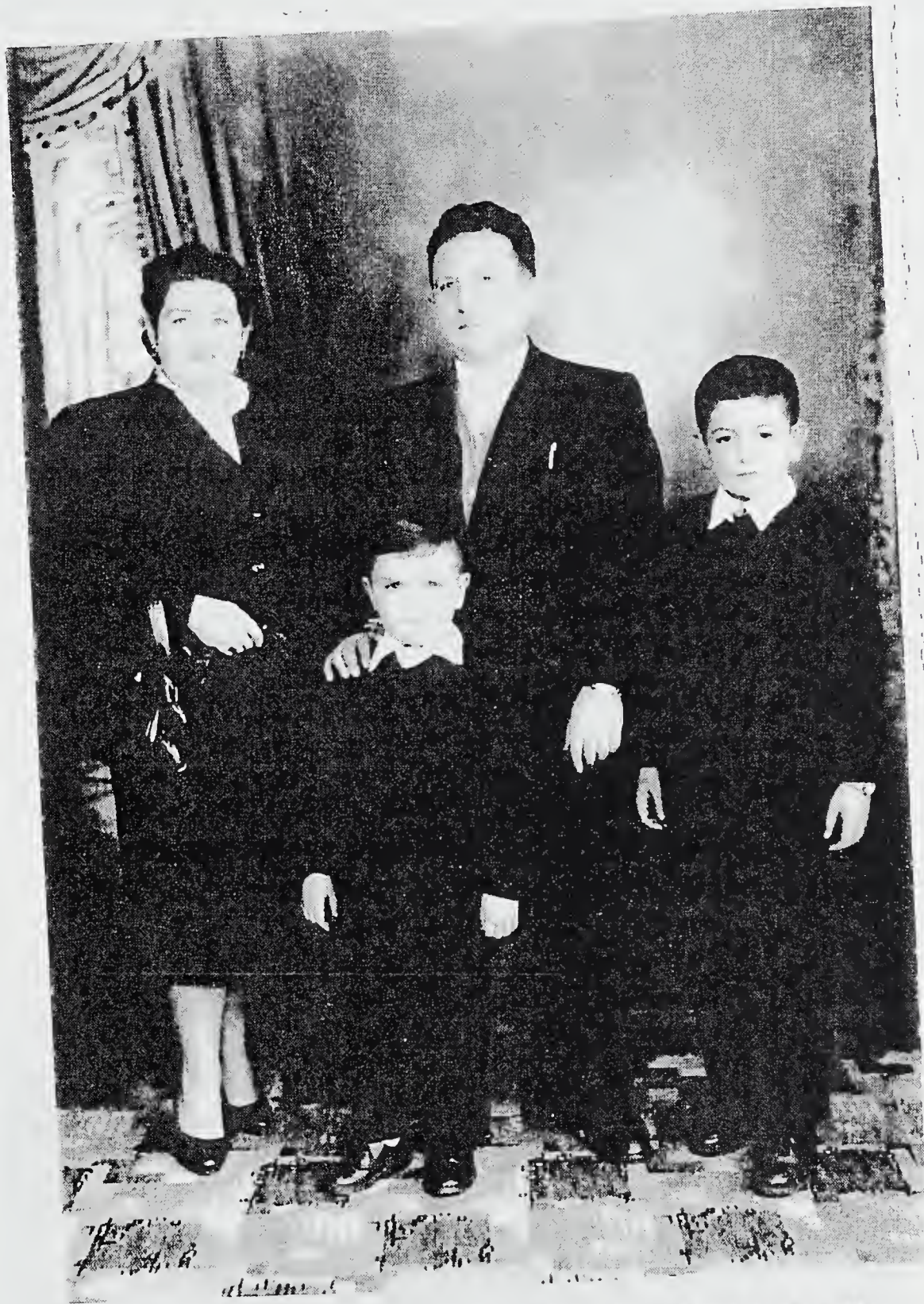


1937

My mother Raizel (Gruber) Barasch
My sister Rosa (Barasch) Baras and I age 11



My grandfather Josef Gruber
My grandmother Faiga (Waldbaum) Gruber
My aunt Lilly (Gruber) Silber
My uncle Abraham Gruber



My sister Rosa Baras, her husband Izak
and her two sons Victor and Silvio

My dear brother Ira -18 years old.
I had 3 more brothers: Eli, Nachman and Benjamin.
Not even a picture was left but, they all live in my memory.



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